

NEW COMPLETE CRIME MYSTERY STORIES

15¢

POPULAR DETECTIVE

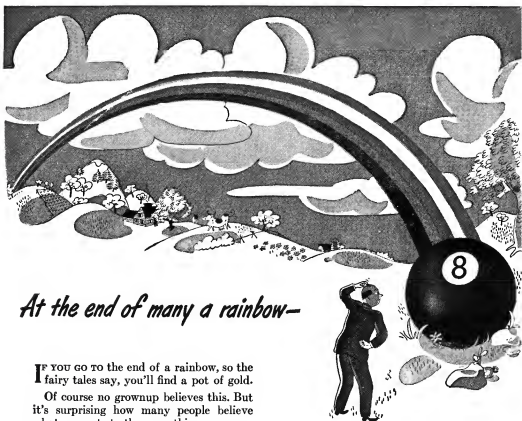
MAY

FIVE *Gray Rats*
A Mystery Novelet
By MERLE CONSTINER

SOUVENIR
FROM SAIPAN
An Exciting Novelet
By J. LANE LINKLATER

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

DEATH HAS NO LOVE-LIFE
A Chet Lacey Novelet
By ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN



At the end of many a rainbow—

IF YOU GO TO the end of a rainbow, so the fairy tales say, you'll find a pot of gold.

Of course no grownup believes this. But it's surprising how many people believe what amounts to the same thing.

That is, many of us have a dreamy notion that somewhere, sometime, we'll come upon a good deal of money. We go along from day to day, spending nearly all we make, and believing that *somehow* our financial future will take care of itself.

Unfortunately, this sort of rainbow-chasing is much more apt to make you wind up behind the eight ball than with a pot of gold.

When you come right down to it, the only sure-fire way the average man can plan financial security for himself and his family is through saving—and saving regularly.

One of the soundest, most convenient ways to save is by buying U. S. Savings Bonds through the Payroll Plan.

These bonds are the safest in the world. They mount up fast. And in just 10 years, they pay you \$4 for every \$3 you put in.

So isn't it just plain common sense to buy every U. S. Savings Bond you can possibly afford?

P. S. You can buy U. S. Savings Bonds at any bank or post office, too.

SAVE THE EASY WAY... BUY YOUR BONDS THROUGH PAYROLL SAVINGS

*Contributed by this magazine in co-operation
with the Magazine Publishers of America as a public service.*





Thousands Now Play Popular Songs

who didn't know a note of music before!



Plays Hit Songs

I am on the seventh lesson and can already play several hit songs. The cost seems so little for what I have already accomplished. I don't know how to thank you for making such a course possible.

*B. E. S.,
Lumburg, Ark.



Easy To Understand

I find the lessons easy to understand. One of the most helpful things is the clearness with which everything is explained. I recommend your course highly to everyone.

*M. L. M.,
Tucson, Ariz.

You, too, can play any instrument at home, without a teacher, by this easy as A-B-C method . . .

YES, thousands of folks who didn't know a thing about music before, are now having the time of their lives playing today's popular tunes. Thanks to this famous U. S. School, easy as A-B-C home-study method, they learned to play in spare time, without a private teacher.

Just as countless others have learned music this simple, short-cut "Print and Picture" way . . . you, too, can make your musical dreams come true . . . and have loads of fun while learning.

Learn to Play by Playing!

Instead of practicing monotonous scales and exercises, we start you off playing real little tunes with the very first lesson. You begin with simple melodies. When you master

*Pictures by professional models. Actual names on request.

these you go on to more advanced tunes. And in a remarkably short time you should be thrilled to find that you can play many popular pieces by note.

Here's more good news! No matter which instrument you want to learn, it costs only a few cents a day. And the low cost includes everything . . . printed instructions, large pictures and diagrams, valuable sheet music and our special Personal Advisory Service.

More Friends . . . New Popularity

Music is the key to good times. Once you learn to play you are invited everywhere. So if you want new friends, greater popularity and more fun than you've ever had before . . . send for booklet giving complete details. Fill out and mail the coupon now! U. S. School of Music 2945 Brunswick Bldg., New York 10, N. Y. (49th Successful Year)

See how simple it is!

"My country 'Tis of Thee, Sweet land of Liberty"



Look at the music. The first note is "C." Follow the dotted line to the keyboard and locate "C" on the piano. Find other notes the same way. Strike the notes as indicated and you'll play the melody of America.

FREE PRINT AND PICTURE SAMPLE

U. S. SCHOOL OF MUSIC,
2945 Brunswick Bldg., New York 10, N. Y.

Please send me free booklet and Print and Picture Sample. I would like to play instrument checked below.

Piano	Piano Accordion	Modern Elemen-
Guitar	Trumpet, Cornet	tary Harmony
Violin	Reed Organ	Cinéma
Saxophone	Tenor Banjo	Other instrument

Name..... (PLEASE PRINT)

Street.....

City..... Zone..... State.....

POPULAR DETECTIVE

Vol. XXXII, No. 3

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

May, 1947

FEATURED MYSTERY NOVELET



FIVE GRAY RATS

by Merle Constiner

When a ten-year-old crime has a grim present-day echo, veteran sleuth Charlie Blandin goes on the trail—and begins turning a small town in Ohio upside down in order to ferret out those who are guilty in a baffling, diabolical murder set-up! 11

OTHER FULL-LENGTH NOVELETS

- DEATH HAS NO LOVE-LIFE.....*Robert Sidney Bowen* 34
The baffling murder of a mystery girl in blue starts Chet Lacey unraveling a grisly crime pattern traced in crimson!
- SOUVENIR FROM SAIPAN.....*J. Lane Linklater* 62
Pete Lawton, returned war hero and ex-bookie, heads right for the racetrack—and the longshot payoff's in murder coin!

SHORT STORIES

- TWO GRAND FINALE!.....*Joe Archibald* 53
Willie Klump toys with trouble on the trail of a rich doll
- THEY DO IT WITH MIRRORS.....*Simon York* 76
When Ed Hall finds the body, it's clearly a case of murder
- THE MILLS GRIND FAST.....*William Hopson* 87
Deputy Joe Sneed couldn't resist the desperate call for help
- CARGO OF DEATH.....*Wyatt Blasingame* 99
Game Warden Carter just couldn't keep his nose out of murder

FEATURES

- OFFICIAL BUSINESS.....*The Editor* 6
A friendly department where our readers and the editor meet
- KITTY TAKEN FOR A RIDE.....*Leo Marr* 94
The amazing true story of a puzzling and fiendish crime case

POPULAR DETECTIVE, published every other month by Better Publications, Inc., at 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. N. L. Pines, President. Subscription (12 issues), \$1.80; single copies, \$.15. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. Reentered as second-class matter April 14, 1938, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1947, by Better Publications, Inc. In communicating with this magazine, please include your postal zone number, if any. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelope and are submitted at the author's risk. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any living person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence. Printed in the U.S.A.

*A stranger to her heart!
... but she knew she loved him more
than anything else in the world!*



JOHN WAYNE • GAIL RUSSELL

Angel and the **BADMAN**



HARRY CAREY • BRUCE CABOT • IRENE RICH • LEE DIXON
STEPHEN GRANT • TOM POWERS • PAUL HURST

Written and Directed by James Edward Grant

A JOHN WAYNE PRODUCTION

A REPUBLIC PICTURE



OFFICIAL BUSINESS

A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS
AND THE EDITOR MEET

JOHNNY STAFFORD leaned forward, spoke in confidential tones: "Look—seven months ago my father put me out of the house. You know him—or of him. He was raised in a brass foundry. He was nursed on spelter fumes. He'd rather swing a ladle of red hot brass than eat. He's tough. He's the toughest man I've ever known. He claims any man is entitled to his liquor and a place to sleep. So he arranged to foot those bills, just as I told you. But if I eat, I have to get the money for that myself."

The wastrel and ne'er-do-well son of old Connie Stafford was talking to Sammy Noe, crooked gambling czar, in Noe's private "real estate" office. Johnny owed Noe eighteen grand and the indefatigable gambler wanted at least five grand—"or else."

The else was a business-like gat held by a certain flat-nosed personage by the name of Cookie! Johnny Stafford was in a tough spot and he knew it.

That's the stirring opening scene of next issue's two-fisted complete novel of the underworld and high society.

AFTERMATH OF MURDER

By

Norman A. Daniels

Mr. Daniels, of course, needs no introduction to our readers. Many of his yarns have previously appeared in **POPULAR DETECTIVE**, and have been widely lauded. In this rip-snorter of a tale, the author has outdone himself! **AFTERMATH OF MURDER** is packed with mystery and horror, surprises and subtlety and capped by a gripping psychological twist!

With the threat of sudden extinction hanging over him, Johnny Stafford, in sheer desperation, goes to call on his millionaire father. To his amazement, the old gentleman offers Johnny a job. It is a very strange sort of a job. Old Connie wants to buy his wastrel son a detective agency.

Johnny is quite willing, figuring that he can easily pay off his debt to Sammy Noe out of the profits. It shouldn't take long.

Only there is a catch in the job. Johnny must first prove he is worthy by acting as bodyguard to old and crabbed Luther Arnold.

It Seems Simple, But—

The original assignment seems simple enough. Johnny is to bring an envelope, which will be sealed with sealing-wax and stamped with Arnold's signet ring, from Arnold's old, broken-down mansion to his father's place, a matter of ten blocks. This packet will be placed in Connie Stafford's safe. Arnold will be present when this is done. Johnny agrees.

At the Arnold mansion, Johnny finds that the old man has a niece by the name of Ivy. This slick-chick thinks Johnny is "cute" and says so. But Johnny discovers that part of his job consists of "laying off" Ivy completely. He mustn't even talk to her.

With the sealed envelope safely in his inside pocket, Johnny passes one of his favorite taverns. He goes in for a couple of "quick ones." That envelope seems to be burning a hole in Johnny's pocket. He finds he can open it very easily with the simple pressure of his thumbnail. He does so and discovers that it contains fifty thousand dollars!

Here seems a simple way out of all Johnny's troubles. He can pay off Sammy Noe and have a considerable "nest egg" for himself. He knows, way in the back of his head, that for all this, crabbed old Luther Arnold must die. If Arnold doesn't die, Johnny knows his own doom is sealed at the hands of the flat-nosed Cookie.

Murder Stalks!

Johnny Stafford finds the entire matter much easier than he anticipated. Returning to the Arnold mansion, he sees the old man and the niece leave by the front door. He gains access through the back way, switches envelopes and deposits some securities in place of the money.

On his way back to his father's house, Johnny has a couple more "quick ones." Reaching the Stafford domicile, he finds Luther Arnold with his parent. Ivy has gone

to Chicago. Johnny actually sees the phony envelope deposited in his father's safe. Arnold has seen it too. But both men tell Johnny however, that he cannot be trusted. He can't even go ten blocks without entering a saloon. The job and the offer of the detective agency goes glimmering.

That night Johnny Stafford again enters the Ramshackle Arnold mansion through the back way. He knows the old man will be alone. He finds Arnold in bed. Johnny winds his fingers around the old man's throat. Then there is a blinding flash and Johnny is rendered unconscious from a blow on the head!

The Unknown Witness

Did Johnny Stafford kill old Luther Arnold? He isn't sure. If he did, there is an unknown witness to his crime! Johnny goes out on a tear and finally wrecks his father's car. He is put in jail where he meets his old pal Lieutenant Ray Delmar of Homicide.

An autopsy apparently proves that old Luther Arnold has been tortured to death while Johnny Stafford is in jail! That seems to leave Johnny out as the killer, and yet—

How does the fifty grand land in a refuse can? Does Ivy really go to Chicago? Is Johnny guilty? What does Lieutenant Ray Delmar suspect? These and other questions are answered in **AFTERMATH OF MURDER**—a novel that will hold you breathless! Just wait until you hit the unexpected twist at the finish we told you about!

AFTERMATH OF MURDER will keep you guessing from start to finish—and you'll enjoy every bit of it!

Mathematics and Murder

In the same issue, a smashing novelet—**DEATH WATCH** by Arthur Leo Zagat. Just because the hero of this opus is a teacher of mathematics in Southport High School, don't get the idea that he is namby-pamby or that the story is lacking in action. You never came across more knock-'em-down-drag-'em-out stuff in your life. Hairbreadth escapes—near miss shots and slugs. You'll be enthralled.

You see, mathematics teacher, Donald Lanham, resents the fact that one of his pupils wears a Discharge Emblem in his lapel. Lanham could have worn one of those himself, except for a minor injury. He is only four years older than his pupil—William Moore.

Lanham notices that Moore's classroom work has fallen off. He asks the pupil to

[Turn page]

NEW SECURITY PLAN PAYS HOSPITAL & DOCTOR BILLS... Costs only 3¢ a day!



**PROTECTS YOU
IN CASE OF
SICKNESS
OR ACCIDENT**

INDIVIDUAL or FAMILY

Insure NOW, before it's too late! Protect your savings against Hospital expense. Here's an amazing offer of safe, dependable coverage under America's most popular Hospitalization Plan. Family or Individual eligible. No Medical Examination. When sickness or accident strikes, you may go to any Hospital in U. S. or Canada under any Doctor's care. **YOUR EXPENSES WILL BE PAID** exactly as Policy specifies. Many exceptional coverages included. The Company is under supervision of the Insurance Dept. No agents will call.

CASH BENEFITS INCLUDE

Hospital Room & Board Sickness or Accident Per Day Up to **\$6.00**
Doctor Visits In Case of Accident Per Visit **\$3.00**
Surgical Operations Up to **\$150.00**
Time Lost from Work In Case of Accident Per Week **\$25.00**
Accidental Death Up to **\$2000.00**
Physical Disbursement, Up to **\$2000.00**

MAIL COUPON AT ONCE!

NORTH AMERICAN MUTUAL INSURANCE CO.
Dept. TG7-5, Wilmington, Del.

Please send me, without obligation, details about your "3¢ a Day Hospitalization Insurance Plan"

Name.....
Address.....
City.....State.....

The Steady Pay Profession Good Times or Bad

SCIENTIFIC CRIME DETECTION

FOLLOW
THIS MAN

Operator
No. 38



It Is Easy to Learn!

I will teach you this fascinating science during your spare time at home. It pays to be an expert in Fingerprinting, Firearms Identification, Police Photography and Secret Service Methods. I have trained hundreds of men and women now successfully serving in identification bureaus throughout America. You, too, may quickly prepare yourself to become a well-paid valued officer of the law, often sharing in the generous rewards offered for wanted criminals.

FREE!

"BLUE BOOK OF CRIME"

This book is full of exciting information on scientific crime detection. It will show you how you can get started in a grand career. Now, at amazingly low cost. Clip coupon now... Mail it today.

53 PER CENT

of all Identification Bureaus in the U. S. employ students and graduates of I. A. S. A majority of these men are heads of Bureaus. Many of them know nothing about crime detection before training with me. Now they have steady jobs, good salaries and a fine future. Write today for full particulars and free book. Give me an.

INSTITUTE OF APPLIED SCIENCE

1920 Sunnyside Ave., Dept. 7965, Chicago 40, Ill.

INSTITUTE OF APPLIED SCIENCE

1920 Sunnyside Ave., Dept. 7965, Chicago 40

Gentlemen: Without any obligation on my part, send me the "Blue Book of Crime," and complete list of Identification Bureaus employing your students or graduates, together with your low prices and Easy Terms Offer. (Literature will be sent ONLY to persons stating their age.)

Name.....

Address.....

Age.....

PLAY GUITAR
LIKE THE

COWBOYS
DO... 8



2nd out—every latest guaranteed, simple, easy method. Play cowboy songs the Western way in a few minutes for \$2.00. I will make your friends, the big demand at parties, dances, public entertainments, on the radio, etc. 12 Complete Lessons.

SEND NO MONEY

Pay postman only \$1.00 when you receive your 1st lesson. Or send \$1.00 and get 12 LESSONS all postpaid. (Cash, \$1.30 money order only.) Nothing else to buy. Positive money back guarantee. Rush order today.

WESTERN RANGER STUDIOS, Dept. 475, Hutchinson, Kans.

INVENTORS

Learn how to protect your invention. A specially prepared booklet containing detailed information concerning patent protection and procedure with "Record of Invention" form will be forwarded to you upon request—without obligation.

CLARENCE A. O'BRIEN & HARVEY JACOBSON

Registered Patent Attorneys

78-D District National Bldg. Washington 5, D. C.

Get into Good Paying AUTO BODY and FENDER WORK



BIG DEMAND in Auto Body and Fender work. Start training now in your spare time at home for good pay work. Practical shop experience included. U.E.I. Training covers metal work, welding, painting, etc. Placement service—or we will show you how to start your own shop. Behind U. E. I. TRAINING is a large national organization founded 1927. Write today for **FREE FACTS**—No obligation.

Approved
for Training
under G.I. Bill

AUTO-CRAFTS DIVISION • UTILITIES ENGINEERING INSTITUTE
3314 BELDEN AVENUE, DEPT. X-7H, CHICAGO 34, ILLINOIS

stay a few minutes after school so he can talk to him about it. In the midst of some polite questioning, Moore suddenly goes to the window, steps out on the sill and disappears. The classroom is four stories above the street. Lanham is waiting for the sickening thud of a falling body, when he hears the rustling of ivy instead. Just then, there's a knock on the classroom door.

Lanham opens the door for a detective who gives his name as John Gardner of the City Police. Lanham now realizes that Moore, most likely, has merely clung to the ivy vine outside the window and slung himself into an adjoining classroom. Lanham truthfully answers the detective that he doesn't know where Moore is at the moment.

Lanham now hails a taxi, intending to go out to Moore's house. On the way there, the following comes over the radio in the cab:

"The body of Rand Harlow, sixty-three-year-old bachelor, well known in Southport financial circles, was found at about one-thirty today in a room at the National Hotel, an obscure tavern on the outskirts of the city. Mr. Harlow had been strangled. Chief of Detectives Joseph Martin reveals that the killer is known. An early arrest is expected."

Lanham begins to put two and two together. The caddy remarks that he knew Harlow well—a nice old chap who had a habit of continually taking out an old-fashioned hunting-case watch as he grumbled: "Time is money."

Out at Moore's house, Lanham finds himself alone in the sitting-room. He notices a tile loose in the fireplace. He lifts it up and there plainly sees the watch, inscribed by his Alma Mater to Rand Harlow—1886. The murdered man's watch! To complicate matters further, Lanham puts the timepiece in his pocket.

That's enough folks, to put you in the tenterhooks. To give away one more clue in this thrill-packed story would only spoil your enjoyment of it!

A Chet Lacey Novelet

A third big treat in the next issue is **YOU WAKE UP DEAD**, a novelet by Robert Sidney Bowen. It's another of those hard-boiled Chet Lacey yarns. It's a worthy follow-up to the grand Lacey yarn in the issue you are now reading—and the others we've published recently.

This particular afternoon, Chet was sitting idly in his office, trying to make up his mind whether or not to go to the ball game. The

bootblack, whose name was Tony, came in—not to give Chet a shine, but to deliver a letter. It had been given him, the boy observed, by a young lady who was considerably of a “looker” both as to face and figure. For his trouble, Tony had been give a dollar.

Opening the letter, Lacey found it contained the request that he go to 1245 Vanda Avenue at 8 o'clock that night. What is much more to the point—the letter also contained two crisp one-hundred-dollar bills!

Lacey set out for the ball game. Out on the street, he heard a noise that sounded to everybody like a car backfiring—but not to Lacey. He had heard the sound too often before. Those were shots. It was only a matter of moments for Lacey to prove himself correct. They were shots well enough—and little Tony was dead!

Her Life in Danger

According to his records, there was no one living at 1245 Vanda Avenue who had any particular grudge against Chet Lacey. The house was owned by George Hobson Harris. So at eight that night, the detective was ringing the doorbell. Yes the lady was a “looker” and then some. Only she didn't even want to let him in. She said she never sent any letter. Of course Lacey could tell by the expression on her face that she was lying. So he makes it his business to get in.

Mostly by cajolery and threats to inform the police, Lacey got the girl to admit her life was in danger. Her father was not in good health. There was a threat over the phone from a man she only knew as Carl Vance. She had to produce ten thousand dollars or the “ring” will move against her father!

You will probably be amazed to learn that our bold investigator quit the job right there. Of course, there was a good reason for him to do so! Just what, you'll find out next issue!

Thoughtout this yarn there is an undercurrent of mystery—of eerie menace—of creepy terror! And the way Chet Lacey makes this one come out, you'll never guess in a thousand years! Get aboard the Lacey band-wagon!

In addition, there will be a careful selection of shorter crime and mystery stories in the next issue. A gala feast of fiction for everyone!

LETTERS FROM READERS

WE ARE always grateful for the suggestions, comments and criticisms in the swell letters and postcards you folks are
(Concluded on page 113)

To People who want to write but can't get started

Do you have that constant urge to write but the fear that a beginner hasn't a chance? Then listen to what the editor of Liberty said on this subject:

"There is more room for newcomers in the writing field today than ever before. Some of the greatest of writing men and women have passed from the scene in recent years. Who will take their places? Who will be the new Robert W. Chambers, Edgar Wallace, Rudyard Kipling? Fame, riches and the happiness of achievement await the new men and women of power."



HAD NEVER WRITTEN A LINE SELLS ARTICLE BEFORE COMPLETING COURSE

"Before completing the N. I. A. course, I sold a feature to Screenland Magazine for \$50. That resulted in an immediate assignment to do another for the same magazine. After gaining confidence with successive feature stories, I am now working into the fiction field. Previous to enrolling in the N. I. A., I had never written a line for publication, nor seriously expected to do so."—Gene E. Levant, 116 West Ave., 28, Los Angeles, Calif.

Writing Aptitude Test — FREE!

THE Newspaper Institute of America offers a free Writing Aptitude Test. Its object is to discover new recruits for the army of men and women who add to their income by fiction and article writing. The Writing Aptitude Test is a simple but expert analysis of your latent ability, your powers of imagination, logic, etc. Not all applicants pass this test. Those who do are qualified to take the famous N. I. A. course based on the practical training given by big metropolitan dailies.

This is the New York Copy Desk Method which teaches you to write by writing. You develop your individual style instead of trying to copy that of others. You "cover" actual assignments such as metropolitan reporters get. Although you work at home, on your own time, you are constantly guided by experienced writers. It is really fascinating work. Each week you see new progress. In a matter of months you can acquire the coveted "professional" touch. Then you're ready for market with greatly improved chances of making sales.

Mail the Coupon Now

But the first step is to take the Writing Aptitude Test. It requires but a few minutes and costs nothing. So mail the coupon now. Make the first move towards the most enjoyable and profitable occupation—writing for publication! Newspaper Institute of America, One Park Avenue, New York 16, N. Y. (Founded 1925)

VETERANS

THIS
COURSE
APPROVED
FOR
VETERANS'
TRAINING

Free

===== Newspaper Institute of America
One Park Ave., New York 16, N. Y.

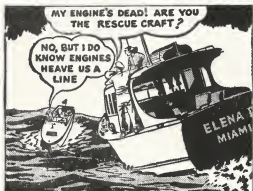
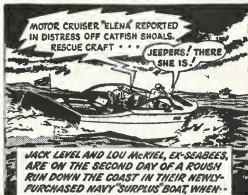
Send me, without cost or obligation, your Writing Aptitude Test and further information about writing for profit.

Mr. _____
Mrs. _____
Miss _____
Address _____

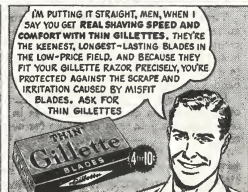
() Check here if you are eligible under the G.I. Bill of Rights.
(All correspondence confidential. No salesman will call on you.) 9-45-597
=====

Copyright 1947, Newspaper Institute of America.

JACK PLAYED IN LUCK WHEN...



20
M
I
N
U
T
E
S
L
A
T
E
R



*A Mystery
Novelet*



Feeny shot her twice, and Blandin's thin hand moved in the smallest possible arc and laid three slugs into the splash chest

FIVE GRAY RATS

By MERLE CONSTINER

When a ten-year-old crime has a grim present-day echo, veteran sleuth Charlie Blandin turns a small Ohio town upside down to ferret out a diabolical murder set-up!

CHAPTER I

Blind Man's Bluff

THE bellboy set the pigskin bag on the luggage rack and Charlie Blandin gave him a nickel, five pennies, and a pearl-handled pocket knife with a little oval plate on it which said "Compliments of Rosebud Corsets." The knife had a broken blade and the bottle-opener gadget was badly sprung.

"Where does the housekeeper bunk, sonny?" Blandin said, as the boy paused in the doorway.

"Number Eleven, at the end of the hall. Why?"

He eased the youngster out into the corridor. He shut the door but he didn't lock it.

Charlie Blandin had been a private detective for forty years. He didn't look old, too old that is. He just looked antique. He stood as straight as a hickory ramrod, and had just about that much meat on his frame. Mechanical aids, such as artificial teeth and bifocals, had long ago eliminated the human element in his bony, horselike face. His eyes

were metallic blue, and crystal clear, and no matter how frequently he shaved there was always a silver shadow of stubble on his chin.

From the long parade of masculine haberdashery he'd seen during his lifetime, he favored the fashions that were in vogue about Nineteen-eighteen. He wore clocked hose, a collar clasp, and a readymade black bow tie on a hook-and-eye elastic. He had seen fashions in clothes come and go; he had seen fashions in crime come and go, too.

His nerves had atrophied years ago, leaving his gun hand as steady as a rock. He was interested in nothing under the sun but his work. He was a grave and dangerous man to be up against.

In the heat of the summer evening, the little room was as hot as the inside of a track walker's shoe, but Blandin didn't notice. He'd been in shabbier hotels than the Bixby, and in worse towns than Springton. There was a big brass double bed, a wicker table, a blistered dresser, a broken down wicker chair. The wall-paper had sweated loose from the plaster and the foul red carpet was loaded with the ground-in grime of decades.

Blandin snapped the latch of the pigskin bag, took out a battered black briefcase. He walked to the window and raised the dirt-clouded pane. His room was on the second floor, just above the entrance to the Bixby Grill. A rickety sign saying "STEAKS" hung over a thumbnail, tin marquee. He laid the briefcase on the marquee, close to the brick facing of the building, and gazed with interest on the street below him.

A TYPICAL small Ohio town, with a population, he judged, of maybe two thousand. Across from him the evening sun, harsh and watery yellow, washed the roofs of the frame and ornate brick false-fronted shops, bathed a row of plump pigeons on their lofty ledge. Below, an ice-cream peddler was pushing his cart up the tarry macadam, a group of high school kids were horseplaying before a drug store, and clerks were filtering onto the pavements, headed for home and supper.

A man materialized on the opposite curb. He appeared to be suffering strenuously from the heat. He mopped his forehead with a handkerchief, gyrating his neck and chin in such a fashion as to give him piecemeal glimpses

of the hotel's façade.

Blandin had never laid eyes on him before. He was smallish, white-skinned, in a dove gray hat and a double-breasted gray flannel suit.

When he crossed the street, Charlie Blandin closed the window, took off his clothes, sauntered into the cubbyhole bath and took a tepid shower. He gave himself a brisk rubdown with the Turkish towel, slipped on his shorts, coindotted in large red polka dots, and reentered the bedroom. The man in the gray suit was sitting on the edge of the bed, holding a big rusty pistol on his immaculate knee.

Blandin blinked. Moving casually, he picked up his bifocals from the dresser top, hitched them onto his ears and studied his visitor. He made a strange spectacle, standing there half-naked, bony and withered, with his Venetian-blind ribs and concave chest.

His caller had a flat face, as pale as the underneath side of a fish. His eyes were wary, coal-black and lusterless. He was smiling, and when he smiled his lower lip came upward, and his upper lip reared, so that all you could see was a strip of pink upper gum.

"You J. Rufus Garlock?" he asked huskily.

Blandin glanced about the room. His pigskin bag had been emptied and his muslin nightshirt and toilet articles lay strewn about the floor. The pockets of his trousers had been turned inside out and his open wallet tossed in a corner of the room.

"No, playmate," he said placidly, "I am not he. I never heard of J. Rufus Garlock."

"Then you're his partner!" the man said dramatically. "I want that five hundred dollars in oil stock you swindled my wife out of! They told me I could find you here."

Blandin dressed. He dressed leisurely and ceremoniously.

"Phooey," he said. "I told you I never heard of any Garlock. I moved in here just ten minutes ago. I hardly believe that anyone has used this room for a long time. You should have smelled it when I stepped into it. I think they locked it up and stopped the clock when Grandmother died. Now you dust out of here before I get angry."

The man's ebony eyes flicked. "I'm not leavin' until I get that oil stock."



Hartley Galbraith lay peacefully supine—with a bullet-hole behind his ear

Blandin nodded vaguely. "Suit yourself. I'll just drop down to the bar for a bit, and raise my standard of living."

He stepped out into the hall, closed the door behind him. After a split second of listening, he walked briskly along the tan fiber runner and knocked on the door of Number Eleven.

The Bixby's housekeeper was middle-aged and harried. She gave off a haunting effluvium of cardamom seeds. She opened the door ten inches and Blandin sidled through and closed the panel with his heel.

Alarm spread across her face. Before she could speak, he cleared his throat with ponderous dignity.

"Permit me to introduce myself, madam. I am Charles Blandin, in Number Fifteen. I wish to congratulate you on the manner in which you run your establishment. I happen to be sole owner of a cozy trailer camp deep in the heart of the beautiful Mississippi swamp country. I'd like very much to have you manage it for me. At the present I'm not in position to offer you financial remuneration but you could fish and hunt to your heart's content. There are alligators—"

It was the first outside offer she'd ever had. She smiled.

"Oh, I couldn't leave Springton," she exclaimed. "I was born and raised in Springton."

HHE HEARD his door close down the hallway, hasty steps clicked down the corridor. He gestured about the little living room, festooned with antimacassars and lace curtains.

"What a charming little nest." He strolled to the window, took a position just behind the sill. Across the street was a deluxe filling station and a pawnshop. "And what a beautiful view!"

The man in the gray suit popped out on the curb, gazed up and down the street. He appeared to be completely confused. After a moment's indecision, he headed down the pavement, turned the corner.

Blandin grinned drily. He bade his hostess farewell and went to his room.

Back in his room, he locked the door. Without the slightest feeling of annoyance, he picked up his toilet articles and nightgown from the floor, placed them neatly in the dresser drawer. His big gold watch said twenty minutes after seven.

He brought his briefcase in from the marquee outside the window, and opened it. It contained a small red book entitled "Fundamentals of Astronomy," a legal size envelope, a gun and a worn holster. The gun was a short-barreled .38, a deadly-looking implement etched in silver. That silver etching was Charlie Blandin's one vanity in this world.

He fastened the holster to his belt, thrust it into his hip pocket. He extracted a letter from the envelope, re-read it carefully:

Charles Blandin, Confidential Investigator,
Cleveland, Ohio
Dear Mr. Blandin,

There's something going on here I don't understand, and don't like. If you can get away please come down to Springton and straighten it out for me. I'm worried about my uncle, Hartley Galbraith, and as I'm his niece and only relative, I feel I should do something about it.

For some time Uncle Hartley has been semi-paralyzed (that part's authentic enough, I've thoroughly checked on it) and he gets about with difficulty. Now, to add to this, he claims to have been stricken completely blind. I think he's shamming. Why does he act this way? He's not weak-minded, you can take my word for it. His hobbies are astronomy and philosophy and stuff like that.

Another thing. He's always been a sort of recluse but recently he seems afraid of something. He won't see anybody and has two ravenous mastiffs prowling the yard to keep his friends away. He transacts all business by telephone and letter. I keep in touch with him by letter. I'll tell you about that when I see you. If you can come, meet me, say, Thursday evening at seven-thirty, at the Bixby.

Sincerely,

Holly Galbraith

At seven-thirty, on the dot, she rapped on the door. Blandin liked that. He liked people to be punctual, liked life to be flawless and systematic. He let her in.

CHAPTER II

Pay Dirt



TODAY MAN on this green earth, other than Charlie Blandin, Holly Galbraith would have appeared attractive and highly desirable. She was a small brunette, well-shaped, with a quirk to her lip and an arch to her eyebrow that said she enjoyed masculine company.

any kind of masculine company.

She was modestly dressed in a simple blue frock, but her dynamic vitality belied and concealed its simplicity. She sat back in the chair, knees together, feet spread pigeon-toed, and glanced pointedly at the house phone.

"Wow, that sun's hot. Do you suppose I could get something to drink?"

Blandin nodded gallantly. "There's no glass in the bathroom, but you could wipe the faucet off with your handkerchief, like I did."

He took a scientific interest in her cheeks as they flushed with anger.

"I had something else in mind," she said coldly, "but you evidently wouldn't know."

Blandin seated himself politely on the edge of the bed.

"Miss Galbraith, did you tell anyone you had written me?"

"Why, yes. I mentioned it to Mr. Stackhouse. Why?"

"Who is this Mr. Stackhouse? Is he a small, pallid man with a—"

"He's a friend of Uncle Hartley's. He's a big, florid man. Why?"

"The man I refer to expected me here. He came in with a gun while I was bathing. He searched the place for identification. It was his idea to tail me when I left. However, I outmanipulated him."

"How?"

"Bless me, child, you ask a lot of questions, don't you? Well, I went down in the lobby and disguised myself as a governess with three Pekinese dogs. He passed right by me." That housekeeper gag was a favorite of Blandin's and he had no intention of disclosing it. "I'd like to hear all about your uncle, Miss Galbraith."

She looked suddenly serious. "He's not an old man," she said. "He's not so very much older than I am. He lives out on Elm Street in a yellow brick house, with a high fence around it—you can't miss it. You can tell by the dogs, too, but watch out for them. Uncle Hartley's a wealthy man by our standards here in Springton. He owns a number of small businesses—coal and lumber yards, shoe store, a few groceries. The aggregate income is quite worth while."

"And now he's suddenly stricken with blindness!" Blandin said.

"So he claims. I don't believe it."

"Any grounds for your position?"

"I've only seen him once since. He

wears dark glasses and all that, but—well, he moves with too much assurance. I can't explain it, but he just has too much confidence for someone who has recently lost his sight."

Blandin frowned thoughtfully. "Let's talk about the dogs. Two mastiffs, you say—to keep folks away. That means he goes out and gets his own groceries. He must go out to post his mail, too. When does he leave the premises? I'd like to meet him."

She stared at him. "He won't leave the premises. He seems afraid to leave the house empty. His secretary, Miss Faulk, comes out every night and prepares meals for the following day. She takes his correspondence away with her and posts it before she goes home."

"Isn't she afraid of the dogs?"

"She'd better be. They're man killers." Holly Galbraith shuddered. "Here's the way they work it. She goes in her car. Uncle Hartley's gate works on a lever sunk in the drive, like a farm gate. You drive over the bar and the gate swings open and lets you into the yard. The dogs are in the yard. Miss Faulk just drives on, hits another rod that closes the gate, and pulls up in the garage. The garage door works the same way, and the garage is really an annex to the kitchen. If you stay in your automobile, you're safe."

"Then anyone can get in?"

"Don't you believe it for a minute. I know Uncle Hartley. He's got something up his sleeve. I wouldn't risk it for a million dollars. If it was that simple, why would he have the dogs?"

"Why, indeed?" Charlie Blandin's upper plate was bothering him. It was an old red rubber affair and with time and tide it seemed to be losing its traction. With great control, he resisted the temptation to take it out and examine it.

"You said in your note that he transacted all his business by phone and letter," he said to Holly. "Would you care to go into that, ma'am?"

"I certainly would. And don't call me 'ma'am.' I don't rock a cradle."

SHE opened her shagreen purse and took out two folded sheets of bond paper. She handed them to him in order, first one, and then the second.

The first was a brief note, filled with small talk and light pleasantries. It was entirely typewritten, including the sig-

nature. The typed signature said "Hartley."

"He writes me one of those every week," she explained. "That's genuine."

The second purported to be a last will and testament. It, too, was typewritten, but there was a wavering, illegible scrawl at the bottom which an imaginative person might possibly interpret as reading "Hartley Galbraith." It was witnessed by a John Feeny and Polly Ingram. It said, in part:

—all my property to George Keyes Stackhouse, my old friend and adviser of many years, in partial compensation for the obligation of his deep and loyal friendship, in the hope that he will watch over the affairs and fortunes of my beloved niece, Holly Galbraith, and on his death to go to the said niece, Holly Galbraith—

"He gives this Stackhouse the works as long as he lives," Blandin said cheerfully, "and then you get what's left, if there is any left."

"That's spurious," she said firmly.

"You mean the signature's a phony?"

"I don't know, and I doubt if any handwriting expert could prove anything, one way or another. I'm talking about the will itself. He either wrote it under duress, or he didn't write it at all. I've got my ways of knowing!"

Blandin was silent.

Her cheeks were as hard as marble. "I was the only one in the world that Uncle Hartley trusted. I went to see him just after he began to pretend that he was blind. He said, 'Holly, it'll be years before I learn to write script again. But I can use the typewriter, touch system. All my correspondence from now on will be typed, signature and all.' And then he gave me the secret."

"It's in the margin," she said. "He fed the paper into the machine by sense of touch, of course, and fed it in clear to the edge of the roller. Then he tapped off sixteen spaces. That was the secret. The margin must be sixteen spaces, not one more or less, to make the document authentic. I always rolled them into my typewriter and tested them. That will be just marginated at ten."

"But a will is a legal paper. It might be different than a social note."

"He insisted that anything he wrote would be the same."

"What's this Faulk woman's first name?"

"Amelia. You'll love her. If you like

bugs in your oatmeal."

"I guess all of you, including Stackhouse, are in the phone book? I thought so. Now think hard. Do you recall a small, white-faced man who wears a nifty, gray flannel suit?" Her eyes were blank. He said, "Don't bother to answer. Well, I'll go out and stroll around a bit. If I were you I'd wait a good half-hour before I followed. . . ."

The black-and-gold sign said "PAINLESS EXTRACTIONS." The office was above a hardware store. On the street level there was a narrow entranceway with a little glass case containing bridges and dentures, and a gold hand with outstretched finger pointed upward and read UPSTAIRS.

Blandin mounted the creaking steps, entered the anteroom. A buzzer sounded and a chubby man in a smock appeared in the door of the workshop.

"Tooth trouble, eh?" he said cheerfully. "I don't believe I know you."

"I'm just passing through," Blandin said. Folks talked more freely if they thought they would never see you again. "I'm a barber supply salesman. My upper plate keeps slapping my tonsils. I want a powder or something that will hold it up. You've been pretty highly recommended to me."

The dentist laughed. "Recommended for this?" He laid a small box on the stand. "Just who recommended me?"

"I don't know his name. I met him on the corner. A fellow in a gray flannel suit. Has a flat face, black eyes, and when he smiles he shows his upper gum."

"Oh, Louie Igo! Think of that. I don't know that I take it as much of a compliment. Louie's not a particularly savory customer. They tell me he runs a gambling business up above his Pastime Bowling Alleys. That'll be twenty-five cents. I'm sure it'll fix you up. Good evening, sir."

BLANDIN tried the town's quota of barber shops, three, before he found one that paid dividends—a dirty, weatherbeaten cubbyhole in the alley between Farmer's Market and City Hall. The screen door almost fell off in his hands as he entered. The ceiling was papered with covers from girlie magazines so that the customers might find gentle amusement when the single, prehistoric barber chair was tilted back. The place was empty but for the proprietor who

CHAPTER III

The Little White Cottage

was standing before his mirror aimlessly massaging his jaw.

The barber moved lazily to attention; Blandin shook his head, sat down in the window shelf.

"Wow, that sun's hot," he said. "I just came in to get out of the heat."

"Make yourself to home," the proprietor said. He seated himself in his barber chair. "I don't believe I know you?"

"Blandin's the name. I'm a dental supply salesman." He went through his routine, then said, "I've got a second cousin in town, a young lady named Holly Galbraith." He watched the barber's face. No sign of interest. "I'm boarding with a mighty fine female, a Miss Amelia Faulk." Still no flicker of interest. "You might have heard of her. She's secretary to a local bigshot. A man named Hartley Galbraith."

The barber leaned forward and spat. "Never met Hartley, but I've heard a lot about him. He's got a lot of kale but he's a doggone lunatic, pore feller."

"Maybe you and I should suffer from the same complaint, hey?" Blandin said. "Maybe it would help our bank account."

"He's got money," the barber said argumentatively, "but it's gettin' away from him. He's throwin' it around like it was water. That's what Shorty Garceau says. Shorty's a Saturday night customer o' mine. He's the watchman down at the grain elevator. Shorty says he never met this Galbraith, and darn if one day the feller don't give him twenty-five dollars for practically nothing."

"Practically nothing? What do you mean by that?"

The barber looked annoyed. "That's all Shorty would say. It seems that Hartley Galbraith is takin' up being a doctor in his spare time and Shorty Garceau is helpin' him."

"Oh, Garceau lives out at the house with him then?"

"No, Shorty lives at the Juno Boarding House. He's never been inside the Galbraith grounds, he says. That man makes me so darn mad the way he hints around and don't talk out like a decent human. I do hate a tight-mouthed man!"

There seemed to be nothing more the barber could tell him. Blandin said good-by and sauntered down the street.

At the drugstore on Fountain Square, Blandin consulted the phone book and made a list of addresses. Things were coming along nicely.



LITTLE white cottage with its steep pitched hunter's green roof sat back from the pavement in a close-clipped yard of white clover and fescue. A walk of fossilized flagstone arced along the velvety turf to a diminutive door surmounted by a delicate fanlight. A suburban neighborhood, comparatively new and, Blandin decided, comparatively exclusive.

The sun had set and the accumulated heat of an oppressive day lay heavy in the air, unrelieved by the gathering dusk. Blandin dropped the brass knocker on its plate. When the door opened, he said: "Miss Amelia Faulk?"

The woman fastened her eyes on his and nodded almost imperceptibly. She was one of those self-made businesswomen, in her late thirties, who made a fetish of her profession. She had a stolid, arrogant set about her chin, wore rimless beauty-type glasses, and her clothes were a combination of schoolgirl frippery and Boy Scout serviceability.

Her low-heeled shoes were garnished with tasseled cords and perforations, her hose were translucent and glassy, and her modest tweed skirt was cut just a little too tight across the tummy. She was going to be a tough baby to handle.

"I have to see Mr. Hartley Galbraith," Blandin said. "I understand you visit him every evening. I thought I'd just ride out with you tonight."

She gave him a frosty smile. "Sorry. That's out of the question. Mr. Galbraith is not well and he doesn't receive callers."

"He'll receive me," Blandin began, and she shut the door in his face.

Blandin sighed. He took a pin out of his lapel, chose the doorbell this time instead of the knocker. He pushed the button in, and then to one side, and jammed it with the pin. Inside he could hear the strident, droning buzz.

A flock of blackbirds passed overhead, nesting in the twilight. He thought of his boyhood, ages ago on the farm, of his father and mother, decided nostalgically

that he should retire and buy a little place in the country. Inside the bell continued its wild, hypnotic singing.

The door slammed open and Miss Faulk appeared. Her powdered face was twisted with fury. "I don't know who you are," she said softly, "but get out of here before I call the police."

Blandin removed the pin. "Just tell Mr. Galbraith the deal is off," he said coldly. "We don't care to do business with him. We're not buying." He started down the walk.

She called him. He came back. "Come in," she said, and led him into a small parlor.

The room, like the entire interior, seemed to have been done by a local decorator at so much a throw for the works. The living room had a mock fireplace, raftered ceiling, blue walls, a peach-colored rug, and a smell of toothpaste and fried onions. Blandin sat on a rosewood divan. She stood by the mantel, facing him.

"What is this deal?" she asked. "What is it that you want to buy?"

"You've got it backward," Blandin said. "We don't want to buy—he wants to sell. He says he's converting his property. In that case we're interested in the lumber yard. And we might take the shoe store." He suddenly stiffened, gave her a queer piercing glance. "Is this news to you?"

She didn't like to admit it.

"I just didn't place you at first," she said evasively. "Now what was that again? Feel perfectly frank to talk. I'm his secretary. His confidential secretary."

Blandin's lips pulled down in a deliberate, insulting smile. "Forget it. I'm not in a position to discuss it with outsiders."

"I tell you he trusts me implicitly. I handle all his affairs!"

Blandin lowered his eyelids. He asked quietly. "Do you have his power of attorney?"

"No, but—"

"Are you bonded?"

"Of course not. But—"

"I guess I'll go back to Cleveland," Blandin said. "The setup smells. There's something shady about this. I don't think my principals would care to put their money into anything of this sort."

"All right, then," she said desperately. "I'll take you out to see him. Meet me

at Main and Cherry at nine o'clock. You just don't understand. I do handle his businesses and he does trust me implicitly. I do everything for him, from checking his ledgers to preparing his meals. Listen, I have deputized access to his safety deposit boxes. That ought to prove it! Not only the company box, but his personal lock-box. Since he's gone blind, I'm his eyes."

"Is he really blind?"

"I don't think so, no. I think it's just some kind of nervous affliction. But don't quote me on that."

BLANDIN took out his list of addresses.

"I have here mention of two cosigners—" he began.

"Cosigners on what? What are you talking about now?"

"The names are Garceau and Stackhouse."

She was completely baffled. "I never heard of anyone called Garceau. Mr. Stackhouse I know very well, of course. He's an old friend of Hartley's—Mr. Galbraith's. George Stackhouse is one of the pillars of our town. He's been very active in civic affairs in the past. About ten years ago he promoted and really built our Springton hospital. Springton can never repay him for that."

"Mr. Stackhouse was on the board of directors until it got going, then he withdrew. He runs a publishing business. You've probably heard of the Stackhouse Entertainment Company? He publishes high school plays. You know—'Next Friday Night the Junior Class Will Offer "Widow Trimble's Flirtation."' His office is in the old Jerris Building. He's known from Coast to Coast."

Charlie Blandin got up, put on his hat. "I never heard of him." He walked out onto the porch. "Main and Cherry—at nine, then. . . ."

The Juno Boarding House faced the railroad tracks. It was a squalid two-story frame structure with a broad, sagging front porch and patched, sooty windows. A man was seated on the green slatted porch swing, smoking a crusty black pipe and staring moodily at the choleric, droopy leghorns which had gone to roost in a blighted quince bush. Blandin opened the chickenwire gate, crossed bare yard, and stepped up on the porch. "I'm looking for a Mr. Shorty

Garceau," he said politely.

"I don't think you'll want him when you git him," the man said miserably. "He ain't much. I'm Garceau. This is a mighty uncomfortable seat, but sit down."

"I'm from the medical inspection committee," Blandin said affably. "We hear you're practising medicine without a license. We don't believe the rumor, of course, but we have to check up. What about it?"

Garceau was appalled. He fumbled in his greasy overalls, produced a match, struck fire to his pipe.

"I don't know what you mean. I never been in any trouble in my life!" His eyes widened. "I catch on now. You mean Hartley Galbraith. It's him that's takin' up to be a doctor, not me. I knowed I shoulda never messed with him, but I simply couldn't say no to them twenty-five bucks."

"I'm glad to hear it!" Blandin exclaimed expansively. "You appear to be a clean, upstanding sort of man and I wouldn't want you to get into any difficulty. Would you care to make a statement?"

"You're durn tootin' I would." Garceau blew out his breath noisily. "If there's anybody up to shenanagins, it's him. And he can't put it off on me. I ain't done nothing wrong. Here's what happened. A month or so ago they was a article in the newspaper about the grain elevator where I work, about rats and how much damage they done to grain elevators and farmers and such."

"Well, some time later I get a letter. It's from Hartley Galbraith. He says he seen the article and was studyin' in his spare time to be a doctor. He says doctors needed dead rats in their work. They was twenty-five bucks in the en-

velope. He said he wanted me to send him five rats, dead, at five dollars per rat."

"Where were you to send them?" Blandin kept his voice to a soporific monotone.

"I was to send them to his office uptown. A Miss Faulk takes him out his mail every evening. I was to send 'em one a day, for five days. I was to pack 'em in a candy box, in excelsior and mark 'em 'Fragile and Perishable.' 'Course they wasn't fragile—no rat is, specially a dead 'un—but they was perishable, I guess. Like I said, the elevator was full of 'em so I just got out my ole twenty-two and knocked over five, one a day, accordin' to schedule."

"Did you address them to Miss Faulk, or to him?"

"To him. I didn't see no harm in doin' it."

DARKNESS was falling. Blandin leaned back in the swing and watched the sleeping chickens in the quince bush, white shimmering blobs in the lush foliage. After a long moment, he stood up.

"Thanks a lot," he said. "And forget the whole thing. Good evening. . ."

The hall on the second floor of the Jerris Building was barnlike and redolent of creosote. It was a square hall, more of a foyer than a hall, and was lighted by a powerful pendant bulb. Overhead was the black glass of a skylight, and behind Blandin was the velvety black maw of the stairwell.

The Stackhouse Entertainment Company appeared to occupy the entire floor. There was the pungency of engraver's acid in the air and the feel of printer's ink. Five frosted glass doors opened onto the foyer and Blandin twisted the

[Turn page]



TOPS FOR QUALITY

BIGGER AND BETTER



knob of the one marked "Office" and entered.

The office of the Stackhouse Entertainment Company was a dismal hole, small and indescribably dirty. Rat-holes in the baseboard had been patched with tin, and once cream-colored walls were layered with grime and cobwebs, beaded with dust, and hung in filaments from the ceiling corners.

A man lolled behind the battered desk. On a newspaper in front of him was a jar of mayonnaise and a box of crackers. The Honorable George Keyes Stackhouse was at dinner.

CHAPTER IV

Jumpy Gunman



STACKHOUSE was a big man in a slate-colored, tropic weight suit. Perspiration made dark splotches under his armpits and the collar of his silk shirt was corrugated and moist. His sandy-red hair was parted at the side and plastered down until it was a gleaming plate

arching over the dome of his massive bulging forehead. His nose, inset between balloon-like cheeks, was globular and heavily traced with bright capillaries.

He looked up as Blandin approached—and his eyes were amethyst-soft and gentle.

"How do you do, sir?" he said.

"I'm Charlie Blandin," Blandin said. "You know, the detective Miss Holly Galbraith brought to town." He paused. "You're Mr. Stackhouse?"

The big man nodded. He stuck his paper knife into the mayonnaise jar, spread three crackers, decked them, and laid them squirrel-fashion in the pouch of his cheek.

"What do you mean 'I know'?" he asked.

"Miss Galbraith told you she was importing me. You told Louie Igo. Igo came up to my room at the hotel to check. He came in with a gun and gave me a crazy story about a swindler."

"J. Rufus Garlock?" Stackhouse straightened, said stiffly, "That's not a crazy story. That's from one of my most

popular high school plays. The subterfuge is from a thrilling comedy about five old ladies in a haunted house. Five miles away, on the desolate moors, there's a prison. One night comes a fire in the prison and the convicts escape. I won't tell you the climax—it'd spoil the show for you." He reached for another cracker.

Blandin gave him a placid look. "Let's don't change the subject. I'd certainly like to hear more about this Igo. So you put him up to it? Maybe you'd care to explain that, too. He had a gun, you know, and that's not only bad manners but a crime against the State."

"I'll say one thing for you," Stackhouse mused, "you do get around and learn things. You're a good man, and I'm glad Holly's got you. I'm sure you'll do an honest, efficient job and earn her retainer. Of course there's nothing really for you to do, but that's all the better for Holly, isn't it?"

"Let's get back to Igo."

The big man's violet eyes caught Blandin's. "Don't rush me," he said tranquilly. "I don't like to be hurried. First I want to tell you that Louie Igo is not a bad chap at all. He's greatly misunderstood locally. It's a sad situation, because society has frustrated him. He really has a heart of gold. I met him years ago when I was soliciting for my hospital.

"Louie Igo gave quite generously, by the way, and since then our friendship has grown. I'm a literary man and—ahem—cultured, and he enjoys visiting me here in the office and listening to me discourse on the arts and sciences. I don't look upon him as a felon. To me he seems a—well, a sort of Robin Hood."

"So you aimed him at me?"

"Yes, I suppose. If you want to put it that crudely. He was here and I happened to mention that Holly was bringing in a detective. Now, some private detectives, I've heard, are unscrupulous. I suggested idly that someone ought to keep an eye on you, to protect Holly's interest, and Louie volunteered. I told him about the J. Rufus Garlock device. He was to intercept you at the hotel and trail you until we were satisfied that you were all right."

"He volunteered?"

"Yes," Mr. Stackhouse said. "He's good natured that way—cooperative."

Blandin shook his head. "Whoosh! This town's almost got me whipped.

Did you know that Hartley Galbraith has made a will and bequeathed his entire fortune to you?"

Mr. Stackhouse chuckled. "No I didn't know it, and I don't believe it."

"I've seen it."

"So you say. This sounds like some kind of a trick. Who are the witnesses?"

"A John Feeny and a Polly Ingram."

"You're making the whole tale up. I never heard of these persons. I'm a close friend of Hartley's and know just about everyone he does. He wouldn't leave me money. Holly's his sole relative and they love each other dearly." Mr. Stackhouse seemed unimpressed. "Are you claiming this is a new will? The old one I've seen, and it leaves all to the girl. As is right."

"This one is dated about a month ago." Blandin suddenly pointed to the phone on the battered desk. "You say you don't believe me. Okay. Call up Hartley Galbraith right this minute and ask him. That'll settle it once and for all!"

STACKHOUSE looked horrified. "The suggestion's preposterous, and highly impudent. One doesn't ring up his friend and say, 'Is it true that you left your bankroll to me?' And that goes double for Hartley. He'd blow his top—ahem—as Louie Igo would say. He considers himself in seclusion and doesn't want to be contacted!"

"When's the last time you talked with Hartley Galbraith?"

Mr. Stackhouse pondered. He smeared a cracker with oily yellow salve from the glass jar, placed it on his outstretched tongue and levered it into his mouth.

"Let's see, let's see. I don't know exactly. But it's been weeks, maybe months. It was before he was stricken blind. Before he got those dogs and went into retirement."

Blandin gazed at him with thoughtful, unseeing eyes. Finally, without further words, he turned, walked to the door. He paused on the threshold, the doorknob in his hand.

"Are you afraid of rats?" he asked.

Stackhouse shook his head. "Not afraid of them, no. Why? I don't quite get the drift to your question."

Blandin stepped into the hall. Through the diminishing slot of the closing door he caught a farewell, slotlike glimpse of the big man bending over the desk top, his amethyst eyes guileless and sad,

cracker crumbs down the front of his inflated vest.

Blandin descended the stairs and crossed the street. He'd just reached the opposite pavement when there was a sharp *crack*, and a chip of cement about the size of a peanut shell leaped up from the curb beneath the white cone from an old-fashioned lamppost.

He passed quickly from the light into the dark, and stepped into a shadowy doorway. From the steep angle of impact he knew that the shot had been fired from an elevation across the street, probably from the roof.

The Jerris Building was a shapeless black hulk in the night. There was no light except in Stackhouse's office. The single pane stood out, a golden oblong in the velvety spring night. Through the diffusion of the grimy glass, he could make out the portly, indistinct figure of the big man, silhouetted against the desk light.

Blandin's eyes moved upward, searched the roofline above the crenelated tin cornice. There was no sign of life, no movement. The gunman was jumpy. He had fired his one shot and run.

There was a hallway behind Blandin. He walked unhurriedly down its length, went down a flight of steps and came out into an alley areaway. He was coldly angry, for he didn't enjoy being shot at. He knew now for a fact what he had suspected all along. This was bad business. . . .

There was a small triangular park at Main and Cherry. Blandin sat on a stone bench, flanked on either side by a Civil War cannon, and watched the moonlight spread the distorted shadow of a corroded equestrian statue across the bare ground. The courthouse clock across the street said eight minutes to nine; Blandin's gold watch said nine exactly, and Blandin's watch was always split-second correct.

A light coffee-colored coupe slid up to the curb. Miss Amelia Faulk opened the door and waved.

Blandin got stiffly to his feet and joined her. They drove down Cherry, crossed the bridge, and turned onto Elm. Miss Faulk seemed somehow a different personality. Her hand on the wheel was bedecked with jewelry and the car was filled with a pleasant, expensive perfume.

"You're in love with him, aren't you?"

Blandin said calmly. "You want to marry him, don't you?"

She pretended not to hear.

Hartley Galbraith's residence, at the end of Elm Street, was in reality a small estate. An eight-foot brick wall sat back about twenty feet from the sidewalk, a mean-looking wall covered with ivy and topped with broken glass set in cement. Miss Faulk cut the car into the gravel-stone drive.

A short distance from the heavy timbered gate the car jangled over an iron rod across the drive and the gates swung inward and open. Within, there was another jangle, and the gates closed. "You'd better be on the level," she said. "This might cost me my job."

BLANDIN grunted. He started to speak when the girl cursed under her breath.

"Here they come!" she said bitterly.

Two mastiffs materialized from the shadows, great fawn beasts with huge heads and heavy muscular shoulders. Spectral and shimmering in the moonlight, they loped silently beside the car, following it up the drive, through the long colonnade of arching trees, in and out of the lacework of jet-and-silver.

"They seem friendly enough," Blandin said. "Maybe they want to play."

She didn't laugh. "Maybe they do. Maybe you'd like to rolipoly with them. They weigh a hundred and sixty-five pounds apiece. How much do you weigh? About a hundred and twenty?"

The car left the lane and they were at the house. Blandin got a hasty view of a sprawling, one-story building, of new brick, surrounded by geometric flower plots, when the headlights shone on opening garage doors. The dogs, well-trained, dropped back and waited. Miss Faulk drove into the garage, the doors slid shut behind her, and she and Blandin got out.

A flight of five metal steps led upward to a grille landing by a door. At the far side of the room, above a work table, was a tool cabinet. Miss Faulk opened the upper compartment of the cabinet, threw a large wall switch.

"Just walk up those steps and touch that doorknob before the current's cut," she said grimly, "and it's curtains. That door is electrified. See that metal grille landing? That's a ground. Come on."

They mounted the steps and entered

the house. The kitchen was comfortable and gay in black and yellow tile, with an oversize refrigerator and electric range to match the setting. They passed into the hall.

"Hartley?" Miss Faulk called. "I've brought a guest!"

Her voice was none too sure of itself. There was no response. Before the echo of her greeting died, she said tensely:

"There's something wrong."

Blandin pushed past her. Galbraith was in his library-study. It was a severe room, the cold, unfriendly den of an ascetic. There was no wainscoting, no comfortable fireplace, no sporting prints. It was more like the pantry workroom of a monastic scientist.

The plaster walls were ivory and without decoration, the bookshelves were steel, as was the desk and chairs. A small gas heater, a cot, and a taboret with dirty dishes on it, completed the furnishings.

Hartley Galbraith was on the cot. He lay peacefully supine, in his undershirt, his mouth lazily open—with a bullet-hole behind his ears. He was dead. He was a small man, hawkfaced and swarthy. He looked contented.

Amelia Faulk dropped to her knees beside the cot, rested her forehead on the edge of the mattress, and broke into queer, deep-throated sobs. In the harsh white light she seemed to have aged ten years. Her serviceable hose were wrinkled in spirals around her calves and her hair, falling over her taut shoulders, showed chemical highlights of artificial tinting in its auburn glow.

"Hartley—Hartley!" she said brokenly. "Oh, merciful heavens!"

Blandin winced in distaste. Any exhibition of emotionalism embarrassed him.

"You're brokenhearted, aren't you?" he said quietly. "In fact you're burned up. You wanted to marry him and move in, didn't you?"

She got to her feet, turned toward him in fury.

"It's no crime to want to marry a man," he said. "I knew as soon as I saw that kitchen that you had plans. You were the one who designed that layout, weren't you? He left it up to you and you were looking forward to the future."

She bit her lip, but he read the answer in her eyes. On the taboret by the cot were horn-rimmed specs, a pair of dark glasses, and a little red leather book.

Blandin picked up the tiny volume.

"Aeschylus," he said. "In the original. He was stretched out here, enjoying himself. Reading Greek in six-point type. Does that sound like a blind man?"

"Who did it?" she asked calmly.

"They'll say you did. You knew how to get through the dogs. You knew about the secret switch in the garage. A smart district attorney will claim you gave him the best years of your life, he wouldn't marry you, so you killed him."

"Hogwash!" she said. She said it brazenly, but she looked uneasy.

"That's one brief they can work up against you," he said. "Here's another. You have access to his safety deposit boxes. The company box and his private lock-box. Say he kept dough salted away there. All right. You were raiding the box, he found it out and you had to shut him up. You told me this afternoon that he'd deputized you to open those boxes."

CHAPTER V

Game, But Not Too Game



MISS AMELIA FAULK began to look at Blandin in a new light. She arched her chest, but spoke falteringly.

"Who are you—I mean really?" she asked.

"A detective."

"Do you believe I killed Hartley?"

"No," Blandin said.

"I'm just showing you where you stand. I don't believe he ever put money in his lock-box. I know his type. He knows that money makes money and wouldn't salt it away. I'm talking about his private box, for of course the company box is clear out of the picture. Everything it contains is a matter of record. The thing that clears you of the theft in my eyes is the fact that you were deputized.

"The law on safety deposit boxes is very interesting, and the average layman knows little about it. Hartley's death actually doesn't affect the company box. A company is a living thing and the box goes on. But a private box is different. Hartley dies, his private box is closed forever. And your deputyship is non-existent from the moment of his passing.

A dead man can't have a deputy."

"You mean if I was pilfering from his box I wouldn't likely kill the goose that was laying the golden eggs?"

"Exactly. Now I want you to think. You were familiar with the contents of his private box. Was there anything in it, anything at all, that was funny? Anything that might have led to his death? A packet of letters, or a batch of photographs, or personal notes, or IOU's? Anything that someone might think he had in his possession here and want badly enough to knock him off?"

Despite herself, she smiled. "His box is like a crow's-nest. A little of everything. His mother's wedding ring, life insurance policies, his high school diploma, the plans for a corn planter he invented when he was twelve years old, about sixteen dozen keys—he owns a good deal of property here in town—and goodness knows what else. A fireman's badge and a policeman's badge, both honorary."

"Who is the beneficiary to the life insurance policies?"

Miss Faulk looked affronted. "How should I know?" she asked haughtily. Then, in a matter-of-fact voice, she said, "I imagine Holly Galbraith, his niece, gets it." Her skin colored slightly. "Life insurance is only a fraction of the money he's leaving."

As she stood there, she reminded Blandin of a game loser at the race track. Game, but not too game. He walked over to the modernistic desk.

There was a sheet of paper in the cylinder of the typewriter.

"Come here a second," Blandin said. "What do you make of this?"

She peered over his stooped shoulder. The typing, centered on the page, read:

a 30,—
(15' 45" E)

Blandin pulled back the carriage, tapped off sixteen spaces with the space bar. The margin was just sixteen spaces wide. According to Holly Galbraith, that made the annotation authentic.

"I've only got one explanation," Miss Faulk said, "and frankly, I can't believe it. Could it be that he was really blind after all. He typed touch system. Could someone have juggled the type so that he'd have no means of communicating with the outside world? Maybe if we worked from that premise we could fig-

ure what he was trying to say!"

Blandin grinned, pulled the sheet from the platen.

"Let's keep everything under control. Let's don't go at this the hard way. Okay with you? All right. This note makes perfectly good sense. Galbraith was an amateur astronomer, and these are simple astronomical signs. I'll break it down for you. The little *a* is a mean distance. Thirty *a*. The long dash indicates south. Which way does this house face?"

SHE pointed to the door by which they had entered. "That's south."

"Then we go thirty, it must be feet, south." They left the study, crossed the hall.

"We must be wrong," Amelia Faulk said. "This is the dining room."

And it was quite a dining room, Blandin observed. It had certainly set Hartley Galbraith back plenty of scratch. Low-ceilinged, and surrounded by a balcony hung with Chinese silks, paintings and embroideries of fruit blossoms and butterflies and birds, the room was sunk four steps below the hall level. The great circular table was an off-white, the thick rug was fuchsia, and the walls were ivory of just the proper tone to lend elegance to the rug and table. Blandin opened a small wrought-iron gate, descended the steps, counting his paces as he walked.

Thirty feet south brought him to the dining room table.

He referred again to the paper. "The fifteen and forty-five with one and two marks behind them, respectively, indicate units of circular measurements. Fifteen minutes, forty-five seconds, east."

"Don't you think we ought to call the police?" Miss Faulk said. She didn't sound any too enthusiastic over the idea.

"Quiet, please," Blandin said crossly. "Now minutes and seconds, as I just said, are units of circular measurement. The only thing circular I can see in this room is this table. We start at east and count off fifteen forty-five. That leads us over there." He pointed. "That's a blank wall." He walked over, rapped the plaster. "It sounds perfectly solid." He turned back the rug. "Nothing there. I must have made an error. Let's see. Now that's east, visualize a clock. Fifteen—"

"Here's what I don't understand,"

Miss Faulk said condescendingly. "First he said thirty feet south. That brings us to the table. From then on he just gave direction and not distance. That means he must have wanted us to stop at the table, don't you think?"

"Obviously," Blandin said coldly. He cleared his throat. "I was just eliminating all possibilities."

It was under the table. An old canvas ledger. A silver table fork had been wedged in the crevice at the upper end of the pedestal so that it served as a clamp to hold the book against the underside of the table-top.

Blandin glanced at the flyleaf:

Contributions for Springton Hospital,
Pledges Fulfilled.

Heber H. Halpin, Secretary.

The first page, dated January 1st, 1933, started out:

Monfort Jewelry Store	1250.00
Carew, Carew, and Norris, Attys.	5000.00
Vaile Beauty Shoppe	100.00
Burger Garage	1500.00

And so on. The total on Page One was forty-two thousand and fifty dollars. Blandin turned a few pages. The record was incomplete, but as far as Blandin could make out well over four hundred thousand dollars was represented. He replaced the ledger.

"Let's get out of here," he said. "Drive me to the police station. You'd better go home. And keep all this under your hat."

"Don't take that tone with me," she said icily. "I'm perfectly capable of knowing what to do."

"Sure, sure," he said. "I know. Well, let's be moving."

Blandin spoke only once on the way back to town.

"This Heber Halpin, he's dead, eh?" he said.

"Yes. But how did you know?" Miss Faulk frowned in the light from the dash. "But he wasn't murdered, if that's what you mean. He died of old age—eighty-seven. He was a grand old man, gates-ajar collar and everything. Springton was in love with him. When the hospital was in prospect, he took on the secretaryship. In two months he was dead. He couldn't stand up under the strain. Then they reorganized."

"Who was the new secretary?"

"Hartley Galbraith was the new secretary," she said thoughtfully.

He got out of the car where he had entered it, at the corner of Main and Cherry.

THE Hotel Bixby had gone to bed. There was a night light burning dimly by the elevator and another, beneath a green shade, on the desk. The clerk, a dapper lad with a bald head and a dimple in each cheek, was manicuring himself with a pair of clippers. He was saving the little crescents of clipped fingernails in a neat pile on the green blotter. Blandin looked ancient indeed, and sepulchral, as he came noiselessly through the potted palms, across the cracked tile floor.

"Bud," he said, "I want you to do me a favor. Call Main three-seven-four-one in exactly twenty minutes. I'm expecting an important wire and I can't wait for it. I've got to know whether it shows up or not. Do that for me and I'll buy you a box of candy or a bunch of roses tomorrow."

"Candy? Roses?" The clerk rolled his eyes. "I'm no girl, you know, Mr. Blandin."

Blandin pulled down his hat brim. "I haven't time to go into that just now. Don't forget. In twenty minutes. I may have further instructions for you."

The Pastime Bowling Alleys were on a side street in Springton's patchwork tenderloin. The neighborhood was a row of hit-and-miss buildings—pawnshops, greasy spoon eateries, second-hand clothing stores, broken now and again with vacant, weedy lots. Beyond the street front the terrain sloped back to a bend in the creek, back to foul marshland cluttered with tin-and-tarpaper shanties.

The building, conspicuous in brown paint with yellow trim, stood out like a sore thumb. There was a gooseneck bulb over the front door and the big window, curtained from sidewalk view with monk's cloth, bore the crudely painted design of a triangle of racked balls surmounted by two crossed cues. From inside came the muted sound of a clamorous, hammering jukebox. Blandin entered.

The pool tables were doing a brisk business. Through an arch at one side were the alleys and at the rear of the billiard hall was a door marked "Private." The houseman, a beetle-browed gorilla in a pink sport shirt, was leaning

on the counter by the beer hatch, keeping an eye on the crippled rackboy, watching the change he picked up.

"Sorry, friend," Blandin said, "but I'm pressed for time. I want to see Robin Hood."

The houseman swung his huge head in Blandin's direction. "Who?"

"That's just one of his aliases. I'm referring to Louie, your boss. This is important. Just step back and tell him that J. Rufus Garlock wants a word with him."

The houseman hesitated. He said something under his breath and walked away. After a moment he came back. He seemed suddenly self-conscious. He focused his eyes just over Blandin's shoulder.

"He'll see you," he said woodenly. "That's his office back there, where it says 'Private.'"

CHAPTER VI

Mr. Igo's Hypochondria



LANDIN strolled to the rear of the building, knocked on the door. His knuckles had hardly touched the panel when Louie Igo opened it, stepped back for him to enter. He had changed his dove-gray flannel for a double-breasted blue basket weave and wore

a spotless panama on the back of his head. Wordlessly, he led Blandin through a room bare but for a pigeonhole desk and a swivel chair, through a second door, to another room beyond.

At first glance this inner room appeared to be a disused storeroom. A steel door, heavily bolted, led to the marsh outside, another steel door led to the building proper. There was a stack of billiard cues in the corner, a French phone on a wall bracket, and general odds and ends of the establishment out front.

Blandin seated himself on the edge of a packing-box. Louie Igo faced him.

"Well?" Igo said.

"I was coming out of the Jerris Building tonight," Blandin declared, "when someone took a pot shot at me from the roof. I think it was you. If I find out

"I'm right, heaven pity you."

Igo sneered.

"Smalltown desperadoes give me a pain," Blandin said wearily.

"I bet a lot of things give you a pain, grandpa." Igo smirked. "You musta been in your prime when they had Apperson automobiles and bell-bottom pants and crystal radios. What you want with me?"

"I want to hear you talk," Blandin said. "I want to hear you talk quick and to the point. I want to know about the Springton Hospital. I want to know about Hartley Galbraith's watch dogs. I want to know about a fishy-looking will."

Louie Igo's black eyes went dull and mean. When he spoke his voice had a queer dry rustle to it.

"I'm mighty glad you dropped around to see me. Anyone know you're here?"

"No. I work solo. It brings the best results."

Igo touched a buzzer with his foot. An instant later the door to the office opened.

"Yes, boss?" the big house man in the pink sport shirt said.

"Have Johnny bring the sedan around to the back," Igo said stolidly. "I'll let him know when I want him."

The house man nodded, closed the door. Igo gave an empty packing-box a quarter-turn from the wall, came out with a cloth-wrapped bundle. He laid the bundle on a chair seat, unwrapped it. Blandin watched with interest.

The cloth was a strip of blue and white pillow ticking. Inside was a gun, a wicked looking .38 with a walnut grip.

"This is for you," Igo said casually.

Blandin waited. Igo grinned. "I got brains I ain't never used. Listen to this. This rod is wanted in Cleveland. It knocked off a guard in a payroll heist. Say you're found just outside of town, this gun layin' beside you. Nobody's gonna care about Springton. The bulls are gonna figure you brought some trouble down from Cleveland with you. How does it sound?"

"It sounds foolproof," Blandin said affably. And he meant it. "I suppose you bought it on the open market?"

"I always keep a few around. They're easy to pick up, because nobody wants 'em. Give me a hot gun any time, a rod with some other lug's record on it and—"

The phone rang. Igo answered it.

"Hello? You say someone's calling Blandin?" He paused. "Put him on." He beckoned Blandin to him, said, "Watch yourself. Take it easy."

Blandin put the receiver to his ear. "That you, Edith?" he said.

"The twenty minutes are up, Mr. Blandin," the hotel clerk at the Bixby said. "You didn't get a wire."

"Thank you, Edith. Ah, here's the routine for tonight. Drag Evelyn away from the police station and put her on Elm Street. Maybelle goes right on with her knitting and Carmelita sews up the bus station. You know why. Got all that?"

"Are you drunk, Mr. Blandin?" the hotel clerk asked solicitously.

"Ah, yes, yes indeed," Blandin said, and hung up. He turned to Igo, smiled rigidly. "They're having a party, bless their sweet hearts, a treasure hunt. I'm sort of an umpire."

LOUIE IGO replaced the gun behind the box. His hand shook. "I thought you said no one knew you were here?"

"They're playful, those girls. They must have followed me."

"Girls, your grandmother." Igo was pale. "I know when a dick is checking on his operatives." He forced the corners of his mouth upward. "No hard feelings, eh? How about a little drink just to forget it?"

Light glinted like tinfoil on the lenses of Blandin's bifocals. He said nothing.

Igo spoke and the words poured forth. "I don't know anything about any will, so help me. I've heard that Hartley Galbraith keeps a couple of man-eating mastiffs on his grounds, but I don't know why. I've heard that he was scared of something, but I don't know what. That answers two of your questions. The other one was something about the Springton Hospital. What you want to know about that?"

"You're doing the talking."

Igo pretended to meditate. "I can't figure out what you mean. I was never inside the place." He snapped his fingers, pursed his thick lips. "Wait a minute now, wait a minute! I'm wrong. I was there once. About ten years ago. I'd been failin' and got taken all at once with chills and fever. I spent a week there and they fixed me all up. That's a wonderful place. When they let me

out I was as good as new!"

"What was wrong with you?"

"They wouldn't tell me at first, and finally they all got together and figured it to be what they called hypochondria. They cured me of it and I've never been bothered with it since!"

"I'm going to leave here now," Blandin said curtly, "and I don't want any difficulty."

Louie Igo looked offended. "You'll never have any difficulty here, Mr. Blandin. You can count on that. I'll go as far as the street with you. Yes, sir, Mr. Blandin. . . ."

The shallow, grassless yard in front of City Hall was enclosed by a two-foot cement wall and a gaspipe railing. The frog-shaped building, originally of pink stone, was grimy and rain-streaked. The broad stone steps were cupped with wear. Blandin pushed through the swinging door, into the rotunda. He passed a white-painted fountain, its dry basin littered with pop bottle tops, cigarette stubs and scraps of paper, and ascended the sweeping stairs to the second floor.

There was a small bow-landing at the head of the upper corridor and a tin plate attached to a door panel by screws said: "Hugh Tully, Marshal." Blandin rapped once, and stepped inside.

Springton's marshal was standing by an open filing cabinet, flipping through a rank of cards. He slid the panel shut, turned to Blandin with a grave smile. He was a young man, quietly dressed, blond, with a good line to his jaw and steady blue eyes.

"You're the man I want to see," he said. "Have a chair." He indicated the best seat in the room, the rubber cushioned desk chair.

The electric fan on the homemade bookshelf whanged and rattled. The room was stuffy, humid.

"Thanks for phoning me," Marshal Tully said. "I went out and brought in the corpse." He said it as though Blandin had done him a profound favor. "I checked on you with Cleveland and they tell me that you're a good man to have on the wagon seat with you."

Blandin wiped his chin with his handkerchief, grunted.

MARSHAL TULLY looked out the window. "The county has moved in and taken over, of course. By the way, they were looking for you. Gal-

braith's a pretty important man and I really don't throw any weight. I've just got the coat and hat concession as far as the county seat's concerned." He spoke without bitterness. There was genuine humor in his eyes. "You don't think there's any chance of our smacking the case for a loop before they really get started, do you?"

"I do at that," Blandin said. "If you'll string along with me." He gave him a sketchy outline of events that had transpired since his arrival at the hotel.

"What does it add up to?" Marshal Tully said.

"Something pretty bad, I'm afraid. Now here's what I want you to do." Blandin chose his words carefully. "I think there's something in Hartley Galbraith's lock-box at the bank that we ought to have, and soon. I want you to rush through a court order—it's murder you know—and have a taxman on hand when the bank opens tomorrow morning, so you can get in. I'll see the girl, Holly Galbraith, and find out about the administrator, or the attorney for the estate, and have him on hand. Here's what I want you to be on the lookout for—" He went into some detail. "Then meet me at, say, ten o'clock at George Stackhouse's residence. Bring along Louie Igo and Amelia Faulk. Do you think you can throw it?"

Marshal Hugh Tully nodded carelessly. "I'll do my darnedest."

"Fine. I guarantee it'll pay dividends. Ever heard of a John Feeny or a Polly Ingram?"

Tully looked disgusted. "Have I? Feeny is one of Louie Igo's rough-and-tumble nursemaids. He stays in a flat—ahem—above the East Side Skating Rink. The Ingram dame is his girl friend. Have they been in trouble?"

"I have a feeling they're going to be. Now one thing more. Has Springton Hospital ever had a mix-up with the law?"

"Not that I know of. Is there something crooked going on?"

"No. I mean has the law ever been called in to assist them?"

Hugh Tully turned to the filing cabinet. After an interval, he flipped out a card.

"You're right. Back in Nineteen-thirty-four someone blew the office safe." He ran his eye over the typed information. "It was a professional job. Louie

Igo was a patient at the time, but they couldn't pin it on him. He had opportunity—it was done about three in the morning—but they finally decided it was an out-of-town project."

"What was taken?"

"Everything. The safe was cleaned like an empty bread box!"

Blandin stood up. "Thanks, Marshal," he said. "You've been extremely generous with me. I've been kicked around by experts. Don't think I don't appreciate your attitude. I'll see you tomorrow. Good night."

CHAPTER VII

The Octogenarian Ghost



RIGHT outside the mul-tioned window, thunderheads were piling in the western sky, blotting out the spring stars. Holly Galbraith, in sheer aqua pajamas, with a navy blue terry cloth robe about her shoulders, sat sleepy-eyed on the couch in the living room of her apartment and stared opaquely at the plaster imitation log in the gas fireplace.

Blandin sat beside her, a glass of milk on his knee and a plate of toast and jam untouched on the end table by his elbow. The jam was untouched because it was raspberry, with seeds, and raspberry seeds got under his dentures and interfered with his talking.

"I'm sorry to wake you," he said, "after the sheriff's office has been working on you, but it's just one of those things, you know. You've got a nice place here."

He took a swallow of milk and his Adam's apple climbed two inches, and dropped. It was a nice place, he decided. The furniture was old cherry, waxed—not varnished. There was a gay rag rug on the floor and a few delicate watercolors on the soft blue walls.

Holly's eyes were red but he couldn't tell whether it was from lack of sleep, or from weeping.

"Who killed Uncle Hartley?" she said. "And why?"

He finished the milk with relish, set the glass on the end table, leaving a nice wet ring.

"Ah, you've got something there! Now

your uncle's lawyer has the other will, hasn't he?"

"The authentic one, you mean? Yes."

"Well, call him up and have him get in touch with Marshal Tully. They're going to open his lock-box tomorrow morning."

She frowned. "Can they do that? I mean don't they seal a box when a man dies and then it takes a court order and a lot of red tape to open it?"

"So I've heard." He coughed politely. "Now I've been working quite hard since I've hit Springton, Miss Galbraith. Possibly I should bring to your attention the fact that it is customary to pay a private investigator a small advance sum. This is known as a retainer. As of the moment, no money has passed between us, so if you find it convenient, I'd like it."

"I've got a splitting headache," she said. "I'm confused. Everything's in a whirl. It's been too much for me! What did you say? Oh! It's against my principles to buy on installments. We'll get together over a cocktail when it's finished, and talk."

He shook his head. She got indignantly to her feet, her mules clacking as she disappeared into the bedroom. He thought she had gone for a check book but she came back with her hands clenched. She handed him a ten-dollar bill. He shook his head again. She opened her other hand in a flare of temper and laid ten twenties and five tens on his hat brim by the tea tray. He forgot to take the cap off his fountain pen in his hurry to write her a receipt.

"Did you know Heber H. Halpin?" he asked. "I understand he was secretary to the hospital enterprise, when it was being put across, just before your Uncle Hartley took over."

"Yes, I remember him. He was several hundred years old, I should guess. He carried an ivory-headed walking stick and used to try to work off dirty peppermint candies on the kids from his filthy vest pocket. He was greatly loved by everybody who wasn't under seven years old. Frankly, he nauseated me. I was eleven at the time he passed away. His daughter, Clarissa, lives in that tumble-down frame house between the Baptist Church and the Y.M.C.A. She's as bad as he was. Wow!"

The pressure of the coming rain made the air in the room compact and almost

palpable. A streamer of violet lightning wandered haphazardly across the black bowl of the distant sky. Blandin arose.

"Now you can go back to bed. The marshal wants us all around at George Stackhouse's tomorrow morning at ten."

A gust of rain swept along the side of the building and across the windowsill. Officially, without realizing it, he closed the window.

"One thing more," he said. "Were there any rats in your uncle's house, out on Elm Street?"

"I hardly think so. He never mentioned any. It was a new building, you see."

"Thank you. Good night, Miss Galbraith."

THE BAPTIST CHURCH, on one side, was dark in shadows. Lights from the electric sign of the Y.M.C.A., on the other, tinted the rotting clapboards of the Halpin house with a diaphanous, milky glow.

It had been quite a place in its day and reminded Blandin of the hotshot residences of his early boyhood. Now it had thrombosis, ptosis, and liver trouble. Molding, windblown shingles lay in the tall grass of the front yard, siding was sprung from the wormeaten joists, the gingerbread capitals from the once imposing porch pillars hung limply askew.

There was a light from behind the shuttered window. Blandin yanked the decrepit door-pull. Inside, the gong set up a subterranean clanging.

The woman who let him in was tall and ungainly. She had a stern, lantern-jawed face and her thin hair, revealing patches of white scalp in its interstices, was gathered at the nape of her neck in a fuzzy ball.

"He's at the board meeting," she said courteously. "I don't expect him back till later."

"Who?" Blandin asked. He didn't want to, for he knew the answer, but he couldn't resist it. "You're the one I want to talk to, Miss Halpin."

"Heber's at the board meeting," she repeated. "It looks like the hospital is going across after all. They've collected over four hundred thousand dollars—and they've just started!" She blinked. "What did you say? Me? Why I'm just Heber's daughter. I just keep house for him."

"I'll come in and wait, ma'am," Blan-

din said.

Miss Halpin thought this over. "You may, if you wish. But there's no one here but me. Heber died ten years ago, you know."

"I know," Blandin said solemnly.

She ushered him down the hall, opened double doors, gestured him into a dank high-ceilinged parlor, and sat him on a leprous-looking red plush sofa. After she had placed an album of postcards on his lap, she settled herself in a platform rocker, produced a crochet needle and a ball of cord—and began a ceaseless weaving with her hands.

"Miss Halpin," he said quietly, "I've lied so much in the past forty years it's almost a physical impossibility for me to tell the truth. However, I feel impelled to be honest with you. I could tell you I'm interested in renting a room here, or that I'm a salesman for quilt patches and knitting yarns, or that I have a little grandson that I want you to take care of so he'll be in good moral hands. Like I say, I'm going to be honest. I'm a detective."

"It's about time!" she said petulantly.

"How's that again, please?"

"It's about time someone consulted me. I'll meet a body half way, but I'm not a person to go pushing myself into other folks' misdeeds. Lately it's been hard keeping my mouth shut, with what I know, what I've known all along, and somehow, the past few years, Heber's spirit keeps urging me to get the whole thing straightened out."

"You mean Heber's spirit can't rest, that it's got a guilty conscience?"

She froze him with a penetrating stare. "Heber's spirit is as pure as a newborn lamb. He was flimflammed somehow—he didn't know just how—and the worry and all killed him. He was secretary to the hospital board when he was soliciting."

"Money was just pouring in. There was no hospital within twenty miles and the idea caught on. They got a batch of pledges and enough capital to start. They got credit, too. The building was completed, the equipment installed, and the institution was put in operation. One night somebody opened the safe. They took about ten thousand dollars, and all the records. Among the records was Heber's ledger—with part of the pledges, the fulfilled ones, on record. That's what brought on his heart attack."

"But he must have had a duplicate book, some other kind of record?" Blandin said.

"Not Heber. He wasn't a businessman; he was a violin teacher. When folks sent in money, he just wrote their names down. That was good enough for him."

"Why did he take it so hard? He wasn't really to blame."

"That's what I told him. But here's the embarrassing part."

OUTSIDE, the rain broke into a gale. The house trembled, shook in the skirling wind.

"That's what I tell him," she said, "but he won't listen. He just sits and broods. You see everyone that contributed was more or less a personal friend of his, and folks like to know their names are in a book when they donate to charity. He was afraid of public opinion, so he made out another record from memory. That's what worries him. He's afraid someone's going to discover—"

"—this second ledger. Did he make it out alone?"

"Yes. I tell him to confess to Mr. Stackhouse, but he says that he's afraid to. He says there are wheels within wheels. Why should anyone rob a hospital safe?"

"Ten thousand dollars," Blandin said, "isn't chicken feed. I'll see what I can do. Tell him that for me. . . ."

The East Side Skating Rink had been a promotion which had failed. A long barnlike building at the edge of town, its lower floor was empty, boarded up. The second story had been roughly converted into a flat. The sudden squall had moved on, leaving pools of satiny water in the uneven street. The air was sweet and clean with the scent of fresh-washed grass.

Blandin stood on the curb a moment and sized up the building. It must have been a dive when it was doing business. A black bulk, set in the center of a wooded pasture, it had all the telltale earmarks of a third-rate roadhouse.

"I bet Louie Igo has a piece of that," Blandin reflected. "It's down his alley."

He strode across the spongy turf. A closed staircase, indistinct in the darkness, ascended to the second floor. Blandin climbed the steps, reached a landing, and knocked at the door. He heard the squeak of hinges and knew the door was

opening, but he could see nothing in the black enclosure.

"Who's there?" a throaty feminine voice asked drowsily.

"Charlie Blandin," Blandin said softly. "I've just come from Louie."

"Come in," the voice said. "Walk straight ahead."

Blandin walked four paces. The door closed behind him and the lights came on with a blaze of white. It was one long room the length of the building, for the owners hadn't even bothered to erect partitions. At the far end was a sink and a gas range, with dirty dishes stacked on the oven. A little in front of this camp-like kitchen, was a pavilion of two Oriental six-foot screens, set out in a cupboard arrangement from the wall. That would be the bathroom. Yet farther to the fore, where he was standing, was the living room-dining room-bedroom.

The walnut veneer library table had a halo of cigarette burns around its rim and was heaped with magazines, cosmetics and empty beer bottles. Scattered about were three or four second-hand chairs, a radio, and an old dilapidated bed.

The bed fascinated Blandin. So much service had it seen that its legs had been cut off so that it sat almost directly on the floor. A man lay on it in a tangle of bedclothes. He was an apish-looking customer, with dark coarse hair curling from the neck of his singlet. He lay with his muscle-bound forearms cupping his face, elbows together, like a fighter who is taking a hammering and has gone into his shell.

"Wake up, John," the girl said timidly. "We've company from Louie."

She was a pretty thing, as hard as nails, and fully dressed.

"Were you just sitting here in the dark?" Blandin asked.

She nodded, passed it off with a shrug. "I was listening to the radio. When John goes to bed, he goes to bed. I gotta—Hey, John, here's a man from Louie!"

"If John makes his girl friend sit in the dark so he can sleep," Blandin declared pleasantly, "he must be quite a boy!"

The man on the bed stirred restlessly, sat up. He suddenly saw Blandin.

"What you doin' here?" he asked huskily. "You of all people!" He turned to the girl, spoke roughly. "What you been up to, Polly?"

"He claims Louie sent him," Polly said.

"Let me clear this up," Blandin put in calmly. "I didn't say Louie sent me, I said I came from there. That's two different things. So you know me, Feeny? That's funny. I've never laid eyes on you before. You must be the lad that took the pot shot at me from the roof of the Jeris Building. Did Igo order it?"

FEENY rolled to a sitting position with a blanket over his shoulders.

"Who's this Igo? Who are you? Get out of here an' leave us alone. Before I toss you out."

Blandin ignored him. He turned to Polly Ingram, said politely:

"Did you hear that Hartley Galbraith was murdered this evening?"

She caught her breath, and there was panic in her eyes. Feeny thrust out his chin, said in a low growling voice:

"Dust out of here, you. So that's what you're tryin' to pull us into—murder!"

"I was looking at Hartley Galbraith's last will and testament tonight," Blandin said. "It was witnessed by Polly Ingram and John Feeny. That's what brings me here. It looks like a phony to me. Would you go in court and swear it's genuine?"

"Of course we'll swear to it," Feeny said impressively. "Of course it's genuine."

"Was Galbraith a friend of yours?"

"Polly knowed him. I never seen him until the night he called us and asked us to come out and sign. He told Polly to bring a friend and I just come out o' curiosity. I'd heard about that big house and I wanted to see inside it."

"Where were you when you signed?"

"In the kitchen," Feeny said quickly.

"How did you get past the dogs?" Blandin asked.

"There's a trick gate," Feeny explained. "You drive into the garage and cut a big wall switch. Then you—"

"Did you like the kitchen, Polly?" Blandin asked.

She shrugged. "It was okay, I guess. I didn't much notice."

"What was the color scheme?"

"Say you!" she said. "Who do you think you are? Bustin' in this way and askin' questions!"

Blandin pressed her. "What color were the kitchen walls, Polly?"

There was a tense silence.

"Get dressed, Feeny," Blandin said

calmly. "We're going around to Marshal Tully's. That's all I want to know. You've never been in Galbraith's house, either of you. Galbraith's not been off the premises. That means when you signed the paper you couldn't have witnessed his signature. That's bad enough, but think this over! You know the trick gate and wall switch business. How did you find that out?"

"I've had enough of this, John!" Polly Ingram said violently. "I never did go for it. Nobody's going to railroad me!"

Feeny lifted his hand from the bedclothes, came up with an Army automatic, and shot her twice. Blandin reached for his hip pocket, his thin hand moved quickly, in the shortest possible arc, and as Feeny's gunsight swung on him he touched off his short barreled .38 and laid three slugs into the apish chest. Feeny slammed back against the bedstead. He was dead before he hit the carpet.

Blandin bent over the girl. She died in his arms. He got to his feet, holstered his pistol and straightened his coat. He picked up the telephone and called Marshal Tully at his home.

"This is going to be a shock to you, son," he said gently. "But I'm out in Feeny's flat above the old skating rink. I've got two more for you."

The young marshal was bewildered. "Two more what?"

"Make a guess," Blandin said regretfully.

CHAPTER VIII

Five Gray Rats



THE "Honorable" George Keyes Stackhouse received his guests in his garden. Quite a pleasant spot, Blandin realized, though a bit on the swanky side. Down the slope from the gleaming white stone museum that Stackhouse called his residence, it lay secluded and quiet, enclosed on four sides by an eight-foot lilac hedge.

A few golden motes penetrated the sunbreak of waxy foliage, dappling the cool glazed-brick court with its rustic sun dial and icy-black lily pool. The smell of bursting blossoms, of rose and

lilac and lily, lay still and suspended in the spring morning.

Marshal Tully seemed perfectly sure of himself. "Folks," he said, "Mr. Blandin has something to tell you."

That lad's got nerve, Blandin thought. He doesn't know from Christmas what this is all about.

"I'm going to tell you a strange story about a murder," Blandin began. "Please don't anybody go to sleep while I talk."

They watched him tensely. The two girls sat side by side on a rough bark bench, and unconsciously they held hands. They were dressed in fresh print frocks and somehow, to Blandin's surprise, it was Holly, the younger girl, who seemed a moral support to the older. Miss Faulk was showing signs of strain.

Mr. Stackhouse, their host, dressed in a plaid shirt with five-inch collar points, divided his attention between Blandin and Louie Igo who was cracking peanuts and tossing the shells to the carp in the pond. Igo's dull black eyes were veiled.

"In spite of its several aspects," Blandin went on, "this crime is extremely simple. It's one of the cruelest and yet most obvious cases I ever worked on. It's our old friend murder for profit, for profit and security. It appears on the surface to be a crime of the past, but actually it's a crime of the present, here and now."

"I understand that," Marshal Hugh Tully said. "Hartley Galbraith was killed only last night!"

"Hartley Galbraith was a terrified man," Blandin declared. "He was handicapped physically, which added to his fear. So he pretended blindness in the hope that the deceit would give him an advantage over his oppressor. It did save him this—it kept a spurious will from being foisted upon the courts."

"Who was he afraid of?" Amelia Faulk asked. "I knew, I felt he was, but he wouldn't say."

"He was afraid of you, Miss Faulk," Blandin retorted softly. "And rightly. For it was you who killed him."

She was thunderstruck. "You mean I killed him because he wouldn't marry me?"

"Hardly. You never intended to marry him. You had a much better thing on the string." Blandin took off his bifocals, polished them with a pink cloth. "He was afraid of you, but you'd put the sign of terror so on his soul that he was afraid

to speak out to the world."

Holly Galbraith disengaged her hand from her companion's.

"But the dogs! She came and went every night, so easily. Why did he have the dogs?"

Blandin was bleak. "They weren't his dogs. They were Miss Faulk's. And they weren't there to keep folks out. They were there to keep him in!"

Louie Igo snorted. "Malarkey!" he said.

Mr. Stackhouse raised his great bulk forward in his chair.

"Really, Mr. Blandin!"

"Don't use that tone with me," Blandin said curtly. "I don't like it, and I don't like you. Years ago, when they were collecting for the hospital, Louie Igo got himself into the institution as a patient for the sole purpose of rifling the safe. Which he did. When you learned the records had been taken, you saw the opportunity of doing a bit of big time filching."

"Heber Halpin, the board secretary, was old and forgetful. You got him to make out a new record from memory. As treasurer, you, of course, had your own copy of the original. The donations that Halpin skipped, and they were plenty, you simply annexed to your private account. You made sixty-one thousand dollars by that deal."

"How do you know the exact amount?" Holly asked. "You're wonderful, Mr. Blandin."

BLANDIN shrugged expressively. "I know the exact amount—and so does Miss Faulk," he said gently. "Igo took the records home with him, gave them to one of his riffraff friends the night of the robbery. It took him ten years to figure them out, and he then saw he had some dynamite. He sold them to Hartley Galbraith. Galbraith was the natural customer as Galbraith was Halpin's successor as board secretary." Blandin paused, added, "Galbraith was an honest man. He didn't make them public lest they injure the reputation of the hospital."

"What about Miss Faulk?" the marshal asked.

"She had access to the records and began blackmailing the 'honorable' George Keyes Stackhouse. My guess is that she just about strapped him. Then she got an inspiration. How to get Hartley's

money, through George. Just will it to Stackhouse in a phony will, and go right on merrily with her blackmail.

"Hartley Galbraith's pretended blindness encouraged her in drawing up the phony paper, which she did, not knowing he had a secret margin width, sixteen spaces, which would show up his spurious signature as a fake. She contacted Louie and he produced a couple of obliging witnesses, Feeny and Ingram."

Louie Igo shook his head. "I'm not in this."

"I beg to differ. And when the marshal finishes with you, I think you'll change your story. You snooped around, saw that your friend Stackhouse was being milked, and tried to edge into the graft. That's why you visited me at the Bixby, that's why Feeny took a shot at me."

"But the dogs," Miss Faulk said quickly. "They prove that he was afraid of someone else. Hartley Galbraith trusted me!"

"I know, implicitly. Like a rattlesnake. Like I said, you got the dogs to keep him in. He tried a pretty slick way of getting rid of them, by the way. He had some dead rats sent to him. You, yourself, brought them out from town in a box marked 'Fragile.' My guess is that he laid them around the house and when you came at night, showed them to you and tried to persuade you to bring him some rat poison. Most rat poisons contain strychnine. That's mighty good for bad dogs, too."

Her face contorted.

"But you were too smart for him," Blandin said. "No rat poison for Hartley, no sir!"

Amelia Faulk's eyes narrowed. "I deny it. I deny the whole absurd accusation!"

"We can trace the purchaser of the dogs. That won't be difficult. You left a mess of blunders behind you. Igo will talk, and so will Stackhouse." Blandin addressed Marshal Hugh Tully. "You got the envelope, Marshal?"

Tully produced a long white envelope, handed it to Blandin.

"This does it," Blandin said affably. "This is the baby that sets you all at each other's throats. When I tell you about this, there's the devil to pay."

He took a slow breath, explained:

"There are three keys to Stackhouse's

theft, and they interlock. There's Halpin's second ledger, now at the hospital, Halpin's first ledger, at Galbraith's home—and this! This envelope contains duplicate deposit slips. Money that Stackhouse stole and banked over at the county seat. Check these with the two ledgers and you see immediately how much he stole, where it came from, and when he converted it to his own account. It was this batch of slips that Amelia Faulk was using in her squeeze."

MISS FAULK was silent.

"The crux of the whole case," Blandin amplified, "pivots around Galbraith's safety deposit box. Now, as I was telling Miss Faulk last night, the law is detailed and strict on bank lock-boxes. A deputized agent can get into the box only during the principal's lifetime. When the principal dies, the estate takes over. Anything in the box goes back to the estate. Anything—with one exception. A sealed envelope in the box, marked plainly 'Property of So-and-So,' goes to the person so indicated. That's because many persons take advantage sometimes of a single box."

He held up the white envelope. On its side was written in neat script:

Property of Amelia Faulk

"She didn't want to have it get out of her hands. She simply took an envelope to the bank with her and sealed her gold-bearing evidence up so that when she killed Hartley, and his box was opened, the stuff would come right back to her." He smiled. "I bet a baby could identify her handwriting on it."

Her lips tightened in hate. Louie Igo started to speak, but was drowned out by Mr. Stackhouse.

"I'd like to make a statement, Marshal," Stackhouse said. "I admit it. She's been leeching me until I—"

"It's just like one of your high school plays, isn't it?" Blandin said. "Too thrilling for words." He felt tired. "You take over, Marshal," he said, "I'm going back to town."

Holly Galbraith got to her feet.

"I've an idea this is going to cost me money," she said carefully, "but I'd like to walk along with you, Mr. Blandin."

DEATH HAS NO LOVE-LIFE

By ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN

The baffling murder of the mystery girl in blue starts Chet Lacey unraveling a sinister pattern of crime traced in crimson—and hurls him into a welter of fast action!

CHAPTER I

Blonde In Distress



TOMMY, who mixes them at the Blue Deer better than anybody else in town, gave me a pained look when I ordered Scotch.

"Not on a night as hot as this, Mr. Lacey," he said. "I've got just what you want."

"I know, Tommy. Pinch bottle."

He was adamant.

"Not tonight, Mr. Lacey. This is a new one. Just what you need. You'll go for it."

Tommy was always coming up with new ones, and you were foolish to argue. I didn't, and presently he slid a tall glass in front of me. Inside was something that had all the colors of the rainbow.

"Taste it," Tommy ordered.

I did, and it tasted just like all the colors in the rainbow should taste. But it was cool, and I do not like to hurt bartenders' feelings. They can get back at you too easy.

"You win, Tommy," I said. "What do you call it?"

"I haven't thought of a name, yet," he said. Then snapping his fingers, "That reminds me. There was a dame in to-night looking for you."

"The kind I like to have looking for me, Tommy?"

He nodded.

"This one could look for me any time, any place," he said. "But definitely very nice. Fact is, she's been in every night this week. Wanting you. Where you been, anyway?"

"Vacation with vitamins," I explained. "What name?"

"She didn't say," Tommy told me. "But I bet it's a nice one. With her—"

He let the rest slide as his gaze wandered along the horse-shoe bar. Then he brought it back to me again.

"Sitting in the bend," he said, leaning close. "The blue business with the blue hat. Take a look. Are you in tonight, or not?"

I took another pull of the liquid rainbow, and let my eyes go down to the U of the bar. The blue business was wonderful. The way it looked, and the curves it covered. The face was just a bit too much baby doll, but if the voice wasn't of a kind you couldn't kick. She smiled a little, and it was no use pretending not being me. I slid off my stool, and went down to the one next to her she was keeping vacant with her purse. She salvaged the purse, and turned on the high voltage in her blue eyes.

"Good evening, Mr. Lacey. Tommy's very cautious, isn't he?"

"He doesn't like to make mistakes," I told her. "And he hasn't. Drink?"

"What is that?" she asked, and nodded at my glass.

"I don't know. Help me find out, will you?"

SHE said she would, and I gave Tommy the nod. He beamed and went to work, true artist that he is. I turned back to blue eyes. The baby doll appearance didn't matter any more. Her voice was low, nice, and no come-on.

"I suppose Tommy's been telling you, Mr. Lacey?"

I nodded and asked the usual question.

"Stella Denton. I'm in show business. Or was. That is— Well, you see—"

A COMPLETE CHET LACEY NOVELET



He tried to duck aside
as I rushed him, but
before he could shoot
I grabbed his gun hand

I waited several seconds to see.

"See what, Stella?"

She smiled a little to let me know she like it that way. Then a frown and something funny in her eyes, maybe fear, wiped the slate clean.

"That's what I want to see you about. You are the private detective, and—and you do take cases, don't you?"

"The first is, yes," I told her. "And the second, that depends."

"I'm in terrible trouble, Mr. Lacey. Really, I'm at my wit's end: I don't know what to do. You must help me, please. I'll give you anything!"

A fee of no small value, considering. But in the midst of plenty I am still the choosy kind. Also cautious.

"Know my office address? How about tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow may be too late," she objected. And it was fear I was seeing in her eyes. "You've got to help me tonight. Say that you will. Please?"

"I've been on vacation," I said "It ends at nine o'clock tomorrow morning. Tommy says that you've been looking for me."

"Yes, every night this week!" she admitted in a strained voice. "But tonight is the last night. Really, Mr. Lacey, I—"

Something stopped her—something behind me she could see over my shoulder. The baby doll face grew really white with fear. Terror, you could call it. I turned my head around, but that didn't get me anything. The place was crowding up fast, as it always does that time of night. My eyes took in twenty people or so, men and women. Not a single face meant anything to me. I turned back to Stella Denton, who now had her fear well under control. It was still there, probably, but now it didn't show.

She was taking something out of her purse. She slid it along the bar and tucked it under my hand. I felt paper money. Wrapped up in the money was a hard object.

"There's five hundred dollars, Mr. Lacey," she said as though using up her last breath. "All I have with me. I'll write you a check, later. The Devon. Ten-nine. Promise you'll be there in an hour? Promise?"

The hard object was a key. I let it stay right where it was, the money, too, under my hand. "If I take your key, how will you get in?"

She guessed what I was thinking, and

got sore for a second or two.

"I'm always losing keys, so I carry an extra," she said. "I assure you, this is serious. Perhaps a matter of life or death."

If all the people who have said that to me were placed feet to head they would certainly reach! I got a little sore, myself.

"My business hours are nine to five. Beginning tomorrow morning. Here, take it back."

She stopped me from moving my hand and the stuff along the bar.

"Please, oh please!" And there were tears in her eyes. "I'm sorry if I offended you, Mr. Lacey. I really didn't mean to make you angry."

She swallowed and her magenta nails cut into the back of my hand like little knives. She was off her stool, and spoke in a whisper:

"The Devon, in one hour. Ten-nine. For heaven's sake, Mr. Lacey, please come! Use the key so I'll know it's you."

Then she was gone. My eyes went with her, but only for a few feet. She got swallowed up in the mob, and I couldn't even see the little blue wedding cake affair she wore on top of her golden curls.

I STAYED twisted around, though, for a couple of minutes trying to spot any individual movement in the direction she had taken. But my brother and sister bar flies were going in all different directions at the same time.

"She want to pay for the drinks?"

I turned around and slipped the money and key into my pocket, and gave Tommy the eye. He reddened, and made motions with his spotless white bar rag.

"Just kidding, you know, Mr. Lacey."

"You should choose your spots, Tommy," I said without grinning. "Now, pour these down the drain, and bring me pinch bottle."

"Me and my moth-eaten gags," he sighed, and picked up the two tall ones, wagging his head sadly.

Various reasons sent me out to the Devon, but the one paramount was curiosity. I've seen and heard all kinds, but this one was new, and it intrigued what little I have left to get intrigued. And, also, it might be an interesting way to wind up my vacation.

Anyway, I took a cab cross-town, paid it off, and went into the Devon. The



The man in Betty Winton's car had a gun which looked as big as a cannon and he leveled it at me as the sedan drew up at the curb

man on duty in the lobby gave me a passing look which meant I looked all right. And I stepped into the elevator. I couldn't be sure but I thought the vertical pilot lifted one brow a little when I named the floor.

Before I could decide, he had shot me up there, and slid open the doors. Suite Ten-nine was directly across the hall so I purposely turned right until I heard the doors shut and the kid slide his car down.

Then I went back to Ten-nine, and just stopped myself in the act of rapping knuckles on the paneling. I had the key in my pocket, and she had said for me to use it so that she'd know it was I. Meaning, of course, that somebody else might come along she wouldn't want to see, so she wouldn't answer the knock. Accordingly I used the key and pushed the door open.

"Miss Denton?" I called out.

I halted and stared. She was there. The room was full of light. She was on a divan a little to my right. Stretched out like she was taking a nap. A permanent nap. The plain black knife handle protruding from the center of her

chest would have told anybody that. Because of a corner of the small foyer wall I could only see from the hips up. Maybe the killer was still at the foot end. My common sense told me to get out of there fast, but I'd never paid any attention to such things and I didn't this time. I did, however, slide my gun out of my shoulder holster as I softly closed the door and eased into the room.

CHAPTER II

Frightened Playboy



APPARENTLY the doll-faced dead girl and I were there alone. So I thought for about three seconds. A trick as old as the hills. It must have been that rainbow colored bilge water Tommy had called a new one, dulling my brain. He was behind the door all the time.

I realized it the instant he dug his gun into my back. Then he spoke, and I

really sweated. It was lots worse than the voice of a killer. It was the voice of somebody nerved up, or hopped up, to kill.

"Drop it or I'll drop you!"

As he snapped out those words I dropped my gun quick. He would have shot with the next rasping breath he was trying to drag in.

"Easy does it," I said as I very carefully reached for the ceiling. "You've got the wrong guy, bub. This is news to me."

A little half hysterical laugh from him punctuated my words.

"Liar! Liar! You stole one of her keys so that you could come back and make sure. You—you—"

He called me something, but I didn't quite catch it for I was already catching something else—a blow from the barrel of his gun on the top of my head. I still had my snap brim on so that helped a little. But not nearly enough. I went down for a sure count of nine, and decided to be smart and stay down for a full count of ten. That I hadn't been given the black-out treatment in the usual spot just behind the ear, told me that the kid was just off his nut and not really in earnest.

And he was just a kid. Eighteen, or nineteen. Maybe even twenty, well dressed and good looking. That is, good looking when he wasn't crying like he was now. Yes, bawling like a kid, but silently as he backed up and slowly sat down in a chair.

His gun hung from the finger crooked through the trigger guard. It was almost certain that head humming though I was I could have come up off that floor and clipped him before he could shoot again. Even my own gun less than a foot from my right hand didn't change my mind. I decided to play safe, and live longer.

I watched the kid for a moment through slitted eyes. The tears poured down his face, but he didn't utter a sound. There's something heart twisting to see a human being slowly come apart at the seams. Then what I half expected happened. The gun slipped from his crooked finger and dropped to the floor. He didn't even seem to notice. I sat up slowly, but ready to really make it fast. He gave me tear-filled dazed eyes, and his head a shake.

"Who are you?" he asked in a dead

voice, barely above a whisper.

"The wrong guy you slugged," I said. "Who were you expecting?"

"I'm sorry. I—I just had to do something."

He got that much out and then started to tremble violently. It was seventy-five in the room if it was a degree, but his teeth would have drowned out castanets.

I got to my feet, and picked up both guns. I took a quick look around and saw what I wanted. I went over to the corner table and poured a good two inches into a glass. I came back and made him take it in two gulps. It stopped the shakes, but not the tears. I gave him a couple of minutes more while I glanced around the room again, but noted nothing of immediate interest.

"Who were you expecting?" I asked again.

"Somebody she called Al."

"Al who?"

He stared glazed eyed at me and shrugged.

"She never told me his last name. Just that he was somebody she once knew, but didn't like any more."

"You'd met him?" I asked. "Knew what he looked like, of course."

"I only saw him once, about three weeks ago," he said. "He was talking to her back stage at the theatre. She was an actress. In the Pink Moon. At supper after the show she said his name was Al, and that she didn't like him any more."

"So this Al killed her?" I murmured, watching his eyes. "Sure of that? You saw him do it?"

He started to slowly wag his head, but stopped it short. It was then grief fell away long enough for him to realize he was in a jam. His eyes went wild and he made a lunge for my pocket that held his gun.

"Give me my gun! I'm getting out of here!"

I cracked his clawing hand with the edge of mine, hard.

"If you want help out of this mess, talk!" I said. "Your name can be a starter."

HE NURSED his hand and scowled, but he told me his name was Prentiss Winton. The name clicked, and so did his face. His old man was rolling in the stuff, and the kid was the type of

son you'd expect. Too much spending money makes too much wrong company.

"Go on," I said. "How and when did you get here? Was she like that?"

"Yes. I mean, no. I mean, I'm not sure."

"How long ago?" I asked.

He looked at a wrist watch worth enough money to pay your rent for a year.

"Twenty minutes ago," he said. "I tried to get her on the phone all evening, but she didn't answer. I came around here, and knocked. The door opened, and—and I saw her on the divan there. Then somebody hit me, and I passed out. When I came to I saw that she was dead. Then I heard your key in the lock. I thought you were Al."

He stopped and looked like he was going to go for my throat.

"How did you get hold of her key?" he half screamed. Then, actually starting to lift his hands, "I know! That Al sent you back to make sure she was dead."

I slapped him across the face hard. His teeth rattled, and he started to cry again.

"Stop being a sap, Winton! Would I sit here talking to you, if I had killed her? Now, listen to me!"

The jangle of the phone bell stopped me. The kid jumped as though he'd been shot. But for my fingers around his wrist he would have bolted for the door. I crunched some of his bones for him to stay put. We both sat there while the phone bell rang three times. When it rang the fourth time I went over to the little corner stand. Phone bells, and telegrams, I cannot resist. I spread my handkerchief over the transmitter.

"Hello?" I said.

"Pren, is that you?" said a girl's voice. "Pren! This is—"

That was all. The click over the wire told me that she, or somebody else, had broken the connection. Her voice had been excited, and breathless, but very nice to the male ear. I wondered if she was pretty and waited a few seconds. Then I hung up. Winton was sitting right where I had left him. I looked at him hard.

"A woman—asking for you," I said. "Any idea who it was?"

Something passed across his face, but

I couldn't read its meaning. When he shook his head I knew that among other things he was a cockeyed liar.

"No," he said. "Nobody would be calling me here."

"She called you Pren," I said.

That same something danced across his face again, but he shrugged.

"Lots of people call me Pren," he said. Then as his voice started up the scale, "I'm getting out of here. I'm going to find him."

I was over to him by then, and had a fistful of the front of his jacket.

"You're shutting up, and doing just what I tell you to do," I snapped. "Now, snap out of it. Listen! Do you know if anybody saw you come here? Did you tell anybody?"

"No, I didn't tell anybody. But I guess the man down stairs saw me. I—I've been here before. Why?"

I was thinking too fast to answer right at the moment. I had five hundred of a girl's money in my pocket. Part payment to do something that I'd never be able to do now because she was dead. Well, I'd at least earn the dough finding out who killed her. I have got a conscience, though there are some who'll argue that point. Anyway, the only clue I had to work with was Winton. Let the cops get him, and I'd be outside looking in. Also, maybe his old man would come through with a little something if I got his son out of this jam. And I didn't think he'd done the killing.

ANYWAY, I take chances, and I took one then.

"You're coming with me," I said. "There must be a service elevator, and a back way out. Maybe we'll be lucky. Now, get hold of yourself."

"What about her?" he asked, in a tight voice, pointing.

"Resting in peace," I said bluntly. "Nothing you can do, now. Come on. No, hold it a second."

While I was talking I made a snap decision. Maybe good, maybe bad. It was another chance I had to take.

First I looked him straight in the eye.

"Is that your knife?"

He shuddered, but managed to shake his head.

"No! He gasped. "It's Stella's. Some friend sent it to her as a present. From New Guinea, I think. Why?"

I didn't bother answering. I motioned him to stay put and went over to her.

I took my handkerchief and wiped my own prints off the phone. Then I wiped the handle of the murder knife clean. It was my hunch that the killer had put Winton's prints on the knife handle while the kid was listening to the birdies.

I hoped my hunch was right.

I hoped that a lot of things I was thinking about then were right!

CHAPTER III

Missing Suspect



LUCK was with me. I managed to slip the kid out of the Devon, and over to my place with nobody the wiser. At least I hoped it was that way.

However, when I had given him a drink of my best scotch, and had him comfortably settled in my favorite chair, then the trouble began. He was as hard as a mummy to make talk. For an hour or more I prodded, and bullied, and threatened, but all that he told me I could have guessed. He either just didn't know, or was clamping up for a mighty good reason.

Boiled down, what I got out of him was this. He had met Stella Denton about a year ago, and had become increasingly infatuated about her. They were to have been married next month, on his twenty-first birthday. Also on that same day he was to come into half of a two million-dollar fund set up by an uncle. The second half he would get when he reached twenty-five.

He assured me, of course, that the money angle hadn't entered into it at all, as far as Stella was concerned. No, they were both just cautious and practical. If he married before he came of age his old man might not like it and do things about the fund. Anyway, they decided to wait, so that everything would be legal.

Three weeks ago, though, the night he saw her talking with the unknown Al, a change came over Stella. No, she continued to love him like crazy, but

she became all nervous and jumpy, and scared of something. She denied that anything at all was wrong when he questioned her. But the kid had sense in at least one respect. He knew that she was lying, and that what was happening to her was linked up in some way with this unknown Al. And he became dead certain when she kept insisting that she couldn't even remember the guy's last name. At that point in his story I broke in to tell him about Stella meeting me in the Blue Deer.

"She's been in there every night this week looking for me," I added. "Any idea, why? Did she mention to you that she wanted to hire a private detective?"

No soap. It just befuddled him all the more.

"No," he said, and looked at me dull eyed. "I can't understand it! Why didn't she tell me? I loved her. I was going to marry her."

He let the rest trail off with his mouth still hanging open. The kid was hit hard, and in a small way I felt sorry for him. On the other hand if I eventually got the correct answer to things I was beginning to add up he might turn out to be a very lucky guy. Right now, though, he was on a fair way to turning out a plenty heavy millstone around my neck. Unless I straightened out the mess I'd be in boiling water over my ears with the cops. The key seemed not to be young Winton, as I had hoped. It was this unknown party, Al Whozit.

"You saw this Al only once?" I asked.

"Just that once," he said. Then almost reluctantly, "And when I saw how worried Stella was getting I followed her several times just to see if she was meeting him. She didn't meet him, so far as I know."

"Describe him," I said. "Think back hard, and give me as much detail as you can."

"I didn't see him very close," he said after a moment or two of frowning. "He was medium build. About your height. But his hair was dark. Slicked down, with the part in the middle. He wasn't bad looking, either. But there was something about his face. I mean, it could have been a scar. Right here at the jaw, under the left ear. It seemed to sort of lift his face a little on that side. He

wore some kind of a dark colored suit. And I think I saw a gray snap brim in his hand. That's all I can remember."

I filed the description in the old brain for minute study later, and took his gun out of my pocket.

"Yours?"

"Yes. But haven't fired it in years. Bought it for target practise. We have a range in our cellar."

"What did you think you were going to do with it tonight?" I asked casually.

HE WENT brick red, and started to snap his lips shut, but changed his mind.

"I was worried sick about Stella," he suddenly blurted out. "Like I told you, I tried to get her on the phone all evening, but she didn't answer. I couldn't get her last night, or the night before. I was going batty with worry. I don't know. I just happened to see the gun in my drawer, and I put it in my pocket, and went over to the Devon. If he was with her—bothering her—I meant to chase him away."

He finished by making a helpless gesture with his two hands.

"Okay, kid," I said evenly, and leaned a little toward him. "Now, the question I *do* want answered. No stalling, understand? The truth, or else I may have to drop you like a hot brick in some cop's lap."

"I've told you the truth!" he said with his first show of spunk. "What good would it do me to lie?"

"Skip it!" I said. "Just give me the truth. *Who* was it that phoned you tonight?"

It was like batting him across the face. Rather, like shoving the business end of his own gun into his face. He went all colors, and actually seemed to shrivel up a little.

"I told you!" he managed to say hoarsely. "I don't know. I don't know anyone who would be calling me at Stella's apartment."

He made me very mad and disgusted. It was a rank lie five miles long. My first urge was to bat him around some. Here I was sticking out my neck to help him, and he was giving me the age old end run. To cool myself off I bent over as though to retie my shoe lace. That action was perhaps the least bril-

liant one I've ever performed. I was forgetting that scared people can crack wide open in nothing flat.

The kid did just that. He grabbed up his gun I'd put on the end table, came up onto his feet, and crowned me a blooper before I could move a muscle. It was just, zowie, and the floor opened up into a great black hole, and I went pinwheel spinning down into it.

When I came to I was all alone, of course. He was gone, and so was his gun. And, frankly, for the first ten minutes or so I didn't give a continental cuss. I just savagely hoped he broke his neck on the front steps, and staggered into the bathroom and turned on the cold water tap.

I held my head under it until my brain was full of icicles. One crack on the head of an evening you can more or less take in your stride. Two cracks, though, are different. They work on you mentally, too, when they happen to be delivered by the same person. If I could have got my hands on that kid right then I'd have become more than eligible for membership in the Murder Club.

Time, though, and a good shot of my scotch, eventually drove that kind of thinking away. I concentrated on more important things. The main one being that I was headed for a sweet jam because I'd been sap enough to let that kid get out of my charge. There was no telling what he might do now. And there was a very sweet chance that he might run right into the arms of the cops, if the Denton dame's murder had been discovered. And should the cops get the kid to talk? Well, Chet Lacey and the eight ball would get well acquainted.

So that all added up to but one thing. I had to find young Winton before somebody else did. No mean task that time of night. And the last thing I wanted to do, the way the old head was feeling. I drove myself out onto the street, though, and on a hunch made the rounds of the night spots. I figured that in his mental state more scotch might appeal. But, I figured wrong. I didn't find him. Nor did I meet with any luck when I called his old man's house. Some servant told me politely the first couple of times that Mr. Prentiss was not at home and snarled at me

the three other times I called.

Well, about three in the morning I could hardly stand on my feet. Gremlins were holding a mock boiler makers' convention inside my skull. It hurt so that I didn't care even if I had knifed Stella, and the cops were looking for me. I cared about only one thing. To get between my own sheets, and let myself quietly pass out. And that was just what I did!

The next morning the head was in fairly good shape. The two lumps had gone down plenty. And I was almost my usual early morning happy self, until I started remembering, and thinking. While doing both I went to the front door for the paper.

It was there on the mat outside, as usual. And there, too, the scare headline to confirm each and every one of my fears.

Prentiss Winton had been arrested in connection with the murder of Stella Denton!

FRANKLY, I had sort of half expected something like that to drop on me, and as I quickly skimmed through the three or four paragraphs of the rush story I cursed myself for being dumb bunny enough to have allowed young Winton to slug me and be on his way. That, though, was dirty water over the dam now, and there was just one thing to do. Find out, and quick, just where I stood.

The bit in the paper didn't tell me a thing. Simply that Winton had been arrested on the charge of murdering one Stella Denton, show girl, and so forth, and so forth. Nothing about how the cops found out about the murder, or why Winton was connected with it, or anything like that. A lot of the unstated facts I could guess, but I had to find out for sure, and find out about a couple of other things, too. And how!

About forty minutes after I'd read the morning paper headline I was walking into the Homicide Bureau. Most all the boys there knew me, and the usual greeting cracks skipped back and fro as I headed for the office of Sol Bierman, of the Detective Bureau. Sol and I have been friends and enemies for years, and if there was anybody who could tell the things I wanted to know it would be Sol. That is, unless he knew

things I hoped he didn't know yet.

He was in his office, and as usual looking more undetective than anything you could imagine. When he saw me he grinned, and I started to sweat a little right then and there. Bierman has two kinds of grins. One when he is amused and pleased, and the other when he has you close to, if not right behind, the eight ball. It was the eight ball grin he gave me.

"You didn't shave, pal, so it must be important," he greeted me, and poked his chin at an empty chair.

"Yeah, and I'm going to sue you guys," I played along. "Fine protection a fellow's client gets in this town."

That sat Sol up straight as I hoped it would. Maybe I was in luck. I hoped that, too.

"Tell me more," he said with his grin gone.

I pointed. "That paper there on your desk. Who is this Winton, and who says he did it? And why? And how?"

The grin came back.

"No comment, my friend. And why are you so interested?"

"I just told you. Stella Denton was a client of mine."

"Yeah? For what?"

I didn't have any trouble looking puzzled.

"I don't know," I told him. "She came to me in the Blue Deer last night. About ten o'clock. Been in every night all week. She said she had business for me. Shoved me five hundred as a retainer. I told her I was on vacation, and to come around to my office this morning. She started to argue, and then saw somebody. She blew fast after saying she'd see me this morning. And now I read that somebody cut—"

I caught myself quick, and acted like I was so sore I couldn't finish. Bierman looked ready to pounce.

"Cut what?" he asked.

"Cut me out of earning my dough, and maybe more," I said. Then, just to watch his face, I added, "How was she killed? And did this Winton really do it?"

He didn't answer directly. His fingernails absorbed one hundred and six per cent of his attention. I wondered if I'd covered up almost blabbing out that somebody had cut her heart out. The bit in the paper had not mentioned the

method of the killing. I wished that my head didn't ache so much from those two gun bumps. I wished a lot of things. Priority Number One being that I hadn't dropped into the Blue Deer last night.

"A love nest killing," Bierman suddenly started talking without looking at me. "This Winton and the dame had been playing house. He went to see her last night. After a while a phone call came through for the dame. She didn't answer, though a man's voice had taken a call about twenty minutes before. The Devon's night man rang and rang. He had seen nobody leave so he got curious. He said the dame seemed scared when she'd come in last night. He dug the manager out of bed, and they went up. The dame was there dead with a knife in her chest. Nobody else. The night man said Winton had come to see her. He hadn't seen him leave. We put out a buzz for the kid. A prowler picked him up way over on Nod Hill. Reeling along like he was stiff, but he wasn't. He'd had some, but not that much. We tossed him in the can, but all he could say was that she was dead when he got there. That he got scared, was shocked, and didn't know he was on Nod Hill. He had a gun on him, but it hadn't been fired."

"You said she was knifed," I said when he ran out of breath. "Were there fingerprints?"

"No. The handle was wiped clean. But I don't think by Winton."

I LOOKED dumb. "Huh?"

"The lady had another caller," Sol said. "At least we figure it that way. He got off at her floor, and none of the others on that floor had any callers. He must have wiped off those prints."

Maybe Sol was playing it cagey, or maybe he had really left out an important angle by mistake. The ice, anyway, was getting thinner, and I had to move with much caution.

"He says he found her dead, huh?" I mused and frowned. "He admitted having a key to her place?"

A change came over Bierman's face. It looked like disappointment, and I hoped it was.

"He knocked. Somebody let him in, and konked him before he could see who it was."

"Wait a minute, that makes three, doesn't it?" I said.

That maddening grin spread all over his map.

"Could be, could be," he said. "The first one the killer. The second one, Winton. But the third guy might be the killer who came back, or maybe—"

"Or maybe what?"

"Or maybe somebody who walked into something he didn't expect. If the elevator kid can remember more, I'll learn about it."

As Sol said the last he began to laugh in his throat. I half wondered if the sweat was showing on my face, yet.

"Why the laugh?" I growled. "Because my client gets herself killed before I can do anything?"

"The elevator pilot's description of the bird he let off at that floor," Sol said, still chuckling. "It could almost fit you, sweetheart."

I thrust out both my wrists quickly.

"Slap them on," I said. "You've trapped me. She wouldn't make the retainer a grand, so I followed her home and stuck her in the chest."

Sol grunted and let the grin play around a little.

"Every cell is full his morning," he said. "So beat it, pal. The day I'll slap the cuffs on you will be when I've got my other hand on the hot seat switch. Get out of here."

"Bosh!" I said, and stayed put. "She was my client, and I've a right to hear more. You're holding out, Sol. What else did Winton tell you?"

I felt wonderful when he scowled, and his lips went thin.

"I told you all," he said. "But that kid will say plenty more. Plenty more, or else! Now, scram!"

I got half way to his office door.

"I love you like a brother, Chester, pal," Sol said. "So help me keep it that way. Be seeing you."

"Is that an order?" I asked.

"You'll be around when I want you, won't you?" he asked. "Why make a date?"

I walked back to him, my fists doubled up, my chin thrust out.

"Some time I'd like to bust you one, Sol," I said. "I don't like anybody who interferes with my freedom. Get it?"

"You want I should lock you up? Beat it."

I beat it. Quick.

CHAPTER IV

Forced Ride.

WHEN I reached the sidewalk out front, the sun had burned through the early morn fog, and it was going to be another beautiful day—for a lot of other people. Sol Bierman either knew things, or he was making some more of his perfect guesses. Either way, it was sure fire he was giving me a break. But only a temporary one.

When he was certain I was one of the unknown parties who had jammed up things he would hand me the Hiroshima treatment with all the trimmings. I just had to crack the thing wide open, and to Sol's satisfaction, or goodbye me!

The place to start was my office. I always think best there, and I had thinking to do. Answers, good ones, were needed quickly just in case young Winton brought me into it. If he hadn't done so already. That was the rub. I wanted to know the yes or no about that bad. And during the few seconds I cooled my heels on the sidewalk in front of Police Headquarters, I practically tore the old brain apart for some way I could wangle a visit with Winton in his cell. There wasn't any way, though, without making myself wide open for Bierman's punches.

So I hailed a cruising cab, and gave the driver my office address. During the ten block ride, the back of my neck itched. Go on and laugh, but it is a fact. When I'm in a car and the back of my neck itches, it means that I'm being tailed. Well, at least six out of ten times it does. However, a lot of squinting out the rear window didn't get me a thing. I was fairly certain that no particular car followed my cab all the way to the office. But the back of my neck was still itching when I paid off and went into the building lobby.

My office is a small one on the fourteenth floor. I have no secretary, or any other nylon attraction, so I let myself in. The mail was light. Three bills and some advertising fliers. I dumped the lot into the waste basket and sat down at my

desk. A partly killed bottle of scotch was in the lower right drawer. I was tempted, but my breakfast had consisted of a cup of coffee, and I had some clear thinking to do.

I didn't even get started doing it. The door opened and a sweet looking girl came in. She was well under twenty-five, and pretty as a picture. She made me wish that I were younger, and also that I had shaved.

"Are you Mr. Chester Lacey?"

The kind of a voice you just knew she had. Nice. When I heard it, it was more than that to me. It was a life raft floating toward a floundering man. Me! I stood up, and smiled.

"That's right. Won't you sit down?"

She let me wait while she sat down. I wished twice as hard I was younger. No crossed knees, or any of that stuff. She was a little queen, and you knew it at once.

"I am Betty Winton. Prentiss' sister."

I smiled and nodded. I had already noted the resemblance.

"And I answered your call last night, Miss Winton," I said. "What happened? Did you hang up, or were we cut off?"

The fingertips of her right hand went quickly to her lips and her eyes opened wide. Perhaps she was frightened. Or perhaps it was startled admiration. I decided to add to it.

"And you've been to see your brother in jail this morning; haven't you?"

Maybe she was prepared. Anyway, she just nodded.

"Yes, Mr. Lacey. Pren told me about you, and asked me to tell you that he was sorry. That he just didn't realize what he was doing, until he'd done it. And you're not to worry. He won't mention your name to the police."

Just nice, like that. I almost laughed in her face. Rather, in her dumb brother's face.

"Your brother doesn't know the cops when they get started," I told her grimly. Then added, "What else did he have to say?"

She lowered her head for a moment, and looked up at me under her lashes. She was cute, but I got the feeling she wasn't trying to be. That it was just an unstudied gesture of hers.

"Pren wants you to find the man who killed that Denton woman," she said. "I do, too, of course."

I didn't change expression. "So it was a man who killed her?"

SHE missed it completely, and tossed a bomb of her own right into my lap. "Certainly it was a man!" she said. "I've seen him with that woman several times. I even know his name. And I'll tell you something else, Mr. Lacey. Last evening he threatened to kill Prentiss if he ever went near that woman's apartment again. He made the threat over the phone and I heard him with my own ears!"

I got tingles in my finger tips, and they rippled up my arms like they always do. I covered up by offering her a cigarette and then lighting one for myself when she shook her head.

"You seem to know quite a lot, Miss Winton," I said in my best grave voice. "If I'm to get your brother out of this mess, I'll have to know as much myself. So, suppose you tell me. Now."

Flat as a pancake it fell. She even sniffed a little.

"Why do you suppose I'm here, Mr. Lacey? To tell you everything, of course!"

"And you haven't yet!" I tried to even it up.

She started to tell me, and this is how it was. For some three months she'd been wise to her kid brother and Stella. For the same length of time she'd known what Stella really was—a no good gold digger, who wouldn't bring Prentiss anything but trouble and unhappiness. And hadn't she done just that, now?

Anyway, the sweet little kid had tried to break it up without Prentiss learning about it after it was too late. Mom and Dad were still away on a trip, thank heaven! If Pop had so much as even dreamed that Prentiss was going around with that kind of a woman, Prentiss would have been in plenty of trouble.

So little Betty had gone to work. Solo. She checked and she rechecked. And she shadowed, plenty. About three weeks ago Stella started meeting this other guy on the sly. Maybe pretty often for she had spotted them together four different times. And they seemed to do lots of arguing, though she never got close enough to hear any of it.

"And last night," she said, "when I was certain Pren had gone to see her, the telephone rang at the house. I answered,

and a man's voice asked for Pren. I said he wasn't there. And the voice told me to tell Pren that if he didn't keep away from a certain apartment that he'd wake up some morning dead in a ditch."

"So you phoned to warn Pren, and it was my voice that answered," I finished for her. "You thought I was this other fellow?"

"Yes. And that put me in a panic. I didn't know what to do. If something hadn't happened to Pren already, he might arrive there any time. I tried several night clubs where he might possibly be, and then later I called her apartment again but there was no answer. I told myself I was silly, but it didn't work. I sat up all night waiting for Pren to come home. The phone rang several times but one of the maids answered each time before I could. Some man was calling Pren, she said. Then this morning—I saw the paper. I went right down to the police and they let me talk to Pren. When the guard walked away, Pren told me everything. As soon as I could I came here to see you."

That last gave me a little chill I didn't like.

"Did a Lieutenant Bierman speak with you?" I asked.

She said no, that the only ones she saw were the desk sergeant, and the jail guard. That didn't make me feel any better. Time was marching on too darn fast if perchance Bierman had put a tail on her. Maybe the lug was right out in the corridor now. I was tempted to take a peek, but I didn't.

"You said you knew this man's name," I reminded her. "What is it, and how did you find out?"

"His name is Percy Jones," she told me. "In one of the places where I had followed them one of the waiters said it was Percy Jones."

I nodded thoughtfully, but I felt more like groaning. The sweet kid had at last missed finding out one of the facts of life. Which is that when a lone woman in a joint asks the name of a man with some other dame, no waiter is going to tell her the right one if he knows it. Not if he has brains. It's a double chance for a backfire right smack in his face.

Oh, well, I still had one big angle, but I frowned at my cigarette smoke awhile before I played it.

"Tell me exactly what he looked like, Miss Winton. Tell me every single thing about him you can remember."

SHE did, and it took her all of ten minutes. I didn't mind, though. After I had interjected a question or two I began to get that warm, satisfied feeling inside. Out of what in the beginning had been but thin blue air I was catching the outlines of essential things.

If Sol Bierman didn't get the break to get that smart, too, and held his foot off my neck long enough I should be able to hand him a neat little wrapped up package, and preserve that love he professed for me. Yes, perhaps, and maybe.

It is good business, so I've found, not to be too eager to take on a customer's requests, so I filled up the next few moments by looking thoughtful, frowning, pursing my lips, and drumming finger tips on the desk top. Then I wiped all that off my face, and smiled at her.

"I believe I can help your brother, Miss Winton, but I'm not giving any guarantee just yet. Tell me, do you think you would recognize this man from his picture?"

"I'm sure I could! I mean, if it was a good one."

I punched out my cigarette and stood up.

"If there's a picture, it will have been taken by an expert," I said. "All right, then. I've some things to do right now. Where can I reach you in a hurry?"

"At home," she said. "I'll go there right now, and wait for you to call. Mr. Lacey, do you really think you can help Pren?"

I walked around the desk and took hold of her hands. Fatherly like, of course.

"I'll do my best, and I've got lots of hopes," I told her. Then leading her to the door, "You run along home, and wait for me to call you. I'll do that just as soon as I have something to call you about. Just wait, see? Don't go calling anybody else. You might spoil things. Just wait to hear from me."

She promised to do that, gave me a smile that didn't make me feel my age, and left. Oh, yes, I took a quick peek out the door, but if one of Bierman's tailers was there, he was invisible to my eyes.

Maybe ten minutes later I left the office, took the elevator to the third floor,

and went down the rest of the way by stairs. And out the back entrance of the building. Being over cautious, perhaps, but there are times when you have to be.

Out on the street I gave up another ten minutes to see if I had a shadow. I was pretty sure I hadn't. Then I hailed a cab and went to the Penguin Theatre where Pink Moon had closed a four-hundred-night run only a week or so ago.

The manager of the Penguin is Sid Foster, and we have been friends since way back. Sid was there and tickled to see me. We talked for almost an hour. When I left Sid I really felt good. He was a walking theatrical who's who, and his answers to my questions had let me sink my teeth into something.

My next stop was the Detective Bureau, but not to see old Sol Bierman. In fact, I had all fingers crossed as I went in, and it worked. Bierman was out some place. I went straight to the Rogues' Gallery and kidded Hanson, in charge, into leaving me alone. I spent another hour there, jumping every time the door banged open for fear that it would be Bierman. Finally I left, and with a bit of Police Department property in my pocket. A front and side view photograph. Taken by an expert.

Out front I started looking for a cab to take me out to the Winton home, but on second thought I changed my mind. It was a long way out where they lived, and besides I hadn't eaten breakfast yet. I went into a restaurant and phoned. Betty Winton answered. I told her to drive downtown and meet me at a certain corner. She said she would, and I went right to work on the Case of The Empty Stomach.

I was full and very pleased with life and myself when I walked down to the corner where she was to pick me up. If she said, yes, when I showed her the photo in my pocket then all I had to do was find a certain party and beat a confession out of him. Same which I would love to do. Or, perhaps even better, I could go to Bierman with my story, and let him do the heavy work, and get the credit—and thus be forced to overlook a few irregularities on my part.

As a matter of fact, by the time I reached the corner I had decided that considering one thing and another, going straight to Bierman was the best bet. A private detective can work the other side of the street only every so often.

Make a habit of it, and he's in for big trouble. And big trouble dished out by lads like Sol Bierman is very, very bad stuff.

So I decided that this being a flip-flop case right from the time I'd stuck my nose into it, I'd do one more flip-flop right in Sol's office and then get out from under. A sensible decision, but at times certain things just don't give you a chance to follow them through. This was one of them.

LITTLE Betty Winton's car was a robin's-egg blue coach, and I guessed it as soon as I saw it weaving toward me through traffic. When she pulled up I half noticed that her peaches and cream complexion was gone. She was dead white, and her big blue eyes were man-hole cover size. I opened my mouth to ask, but I didn't ask. The guy in the back had a big cannon, and it was pointing right at me. His picture was in my pocket, but that didn't change anything.

"Get in, Lacey, or I blow a hole in your middle. In beside her!"

In the movies I would dart out my hand and bend the barrel of his gun with my thumb and forefinger, and smack him with my left right into a jail cell. But this was in real life, and I'm not partial to having gunmen blow holes in me. Besides if I was sap enough to try and gun it out with him right there on the curb, Betty Winton might get hurt too. So I let him see my empty hands all the time, and slid into the front seat beside her.

"Get going, sister! Straight out on this street!"

His voice was a low whisper, but it was a little loud in my ears. That was because his lips were right behind me. His lips, and the barrel of his gun resting on the top of the seat with the muzzle pressing against where my neck becomes my back. And a moment later his free hand snaked down over my shoulder and under my jacket front to remove my gun from its shoulder holster.

We rode for five blocks or so with nobody doing any talking. I did a lot of thinking, however, and all of it was bad. Just when I was just ready to clean up the whole cockeyed mess the bottom had fallen out. A touch of fate, a tough break, or whatever you wanted to call it, the jig was up and I was in the middle. What made me sore at myself the most

was that little Betty Winton was in the middle with me.

However, never say die until you see Saint Peter give you the nod to come in! So I put thoughts of me and my dumbness to one side, and thought about the present, and the future.

The man in the back seat was named George Fraser. A few years ago he had been one of the better big shot gamblers in our fair town. I'd known him by sight, and reputation, but that's all.

One day his brother gamblers had suddenly taken a dislike to him, and he'd left town in a hurry. He headed West, and presently the story trickled back that he had got himself put into a Kansas pen for five years.

Yes, I had known him by sight, and reputation, so when young Winton had spoken about a possible scar under the left ear, and Betty had spoken of the scar, too, I had half remembered somebody of that description. Sid Foster had also seen the bird talking with Stella backstage at the Penguin Theatre, and had noticed the scar, too. By then the memory was really clicking, and I'd struck pay-dirt in the rogues' gallery at Police Headquarters. I had found his police photo under local past and present characters.

Fine! I had tabbed him right enough. And I also knew most of the answers that I did not know when Stella met me at the Blue Deer. Yes, it was all wrapped up nice, save for one little thing. The guilty party was holding the gun on me, instead of the other way around. Well, be that as it may, and was, I was still breathing, so I could at least try.

"When did you bust out, Fraser?" I asked without turning my head.

"Wrong guess, copper. I didn't. I got time off for good behavior."

"A lot of good that'll do you now," I said, and turned my head a little.

He promptly set the back of my neck on fire with the muzzle of his gun.

"Eyes front, and keep them there!" he ordered. "Be stupid and get it right now. Both of you."

Something in his voice told me to believe him, and I did. He was hopped to the ears emotionally, and when certain kinds of people get that way half a dozen, or dozen, more murders don't mean a thing.

"You're boss," I said, turning front quickly. "So what's the play?"

"You'll find out soon enough. Just keep your trap shut! And you, sister, beat another red light and I'll spill your pretty puss all over the windshield!"

"I'm sorry. I didn't see it."

CHAPTER V

Killer's Gun



ETTY WINTON'S steady matter-of-fact voice made me cheer for her, silently. She was a thorough-bred if there ever was one. I looked at her hands on the wheel out of the corner of one eye. A little white at the knuckles, but when she took the right off to

shift there wasn't a single tremor. She certainly had received all of the good Winton stock, and her kid brother, none of it. Funny how you usually find such character opposites in rich families.

"Where did you pick up our friend, Betty?" I asked her.

I got the stab of fire in the neck again.

"I said, shut up, loud mouth!" Fraser snapped.

I shrugged.

"Okay," I said. "But now you're playing it dumb. A lot of people in this town know me. Particularly cops. If they see the three of us riding along like mummies they might get curious. You couldn't kill all the cops with just one gun, Fraser."

He took a moment or two to think that over, and then grunted.

"Okay, we'll all look like pals," he said. "But remember, both of you, overdo it and it'll just be too bad."

"I'll remember," I assured him. And then repeated my question to Betty. "Where did you pick him up?"

"I didn't," she told me. "He was in the back of the car, when I drove down after you called me."

I didn't like that too much.

"And you drove him straight to me?" I demanded. "He couldn't have known that you were coming."

"You don't understand!" she said. "He tricked me."

"You're thick, Lacey," Fraser took it up. "The lady didn't know she had a rider until I got a look at who she was

going to meet. But I'd guessed who, anyway."

"Smart boy," I said.

He liked that, and chuckled.

"Yeah," he agreed. "I had the choice. To stay with you, or go pick her up. I was smart. I figured she'd be seeing you soon. So this is the way I wanted it."

It was far, far from the way I wanted it. I realized then, of course, that my spells of neck itching had been warnings. Fraser had been following me like my own shadow, and doing it well. I told myself then that if I got out of this one I'd tear up my license. I was certainly slipping hard and fast.

"You were crazy to kill Stella Denton," I suddenly shot at him.

"Yeah?" was the comment. "Who says I did?"

"You do," I told him. "By taking us for this ride. And there are a couple of angles, too, Fraser. You spell one of them. Bierman of the Detective Bureau, spells the other."

I'd thrown the pitch for a strike but he didn't offer at it. Instead, he thought that was funny, too, and chuckled again.

"No deal, Lacey," he said, and tapped my neck with his gun barrel for emphasis. "Bierman is fishing up a tree on this, and you know it. When I saw you go up to her place, and sneak out later with this dame's sappy brother, I knew just how to play it. To stick with you. Right! Some hunt you put on for that punk last night, Lacey. A guy in the clear would have gone to the cops. You didn't. Not until this morning. Nope. You and this dame are all I've got to worry about."

Well, there it was, and it was no use trying to tell myself I still had an ace card to pull out of my sleeve. I didn't. Sure, I had a pretty good idea why he had knifed the Denton woman. And I had a pretty fair idea, too, why she had been looking for me in the Blue Deer every night all week. Yes, I was quite certain I could fill in all the blank spots even to Bierman's satisfaction. However, the time for that was lost and gone—unless Lady Luck would smile on this humble dope just once more.

Nothing happened for the next ten or fifteen minutes. We'd been riding the main highway through town and were then well out into the scattered house section. Truth to tell, another twenty

minutes on the same road would take us over the State line. And when I suddenly thought of that I began to wonder, and get more than a little puzzled. Was Fraser just making sure of getting out of the state, and he'd wave us good bye when he was safely across? A wonderful thing to hope, but common sense told me it was too good to come true. It didn't. At the next intersection Fraser spoke to the girl.

"Turn right at the next."

I TOOK a look through the windshield, and didn't like what I saw. Just a small dirt road that went back through the woods and hills. I knew that there were a few hunting and fishing shacks back up there, but none of them would be occupied this time of year. So as Betty turned in and drove the car along I wished for the seven millionth time that I had my extra gun along.

It's a trick little thing that I can hide in all sorts of places, and can pop it out for action at the drop of the hat at the right time. But this was once when I wasn't being smart in anything. My little trick gun was back in my apartment. And I was sure Fraser wouldn't let me run back and get it.

"Okay, turn in here, and park around back."

As he spoke to Betty I saw the knocked together shack off to the left. It was a bungalow built hunting camp very much the worse for weather. A plan of attack came to me as Betty shifted out of gear and braked to a stop in back. The plan was knocked all to pieces a few seconds later. It called for Fraser to get out first, but he didn't.

"Out, and the hands up!" he ordered with his voice, and with the gun on my neck.

I did just that and he stuck to me like glue.

"Okay, you," he said over my shoulder to Betty. "Get out and walk in front of us to the door. Be funny, and I'll plug him and take my time with you."

I knew what he meant by that and I began to see red like I do when I'm about set to toss life and the pursuit of nice things over the side. Betty knew what he meant, too, but instead of going into a half scare faint like a hundred other girls would have done, she gave him a scornful look that burned holes, and

coolly slid out from behind the wheel and led the way to the rear door.

Inside the place was furnished like any other camp. Tables, chairs, wall bunks, fireplace, sink, pots, pans, heavy clothing hanging on hooks, and what have you.

"Okay, side by side cozy like on that bunk," he ordered, and gave the back of my neck a jab.

Betty and I walked over and sat down on a wall bunk to the right. Truth to tell I half expected to hear his cannon talk, and I almost spun around for a life or death grab at his gun. Something, I really will never know exactly what, stopped me. I walked over with her, turned and sat down, still keeping both hands where he could see them.

What came next puzzled me for a few seconds, and then the great white light dawned in the head. Fraser took a perch, one leg hooked over a corner of a table, rested the gun on his knee and gave us a slow once over. It was then I knew. I mean that Fraser wasn't a born, natural killer, and he wasn't quite sure of himself. No, not even with his gun in his hand, and mine in his pocket. I took a chance, and threw a few quick words at him.

"Killing a double-crosser in a sudden rage, is one thing, Fraser. But killing two others in cold blood, doesn't leave you a chance."

"No?" he said, and tried to make a big sneer of it.

I shook my head. "No. Bierman doesn't know a lot of things, but believe me, that lad will find out. And he'll hunt you down, even if it's all the way to Saipan. Tell me, were you married to Stella Denton when your pal gamblers sent you West?"

"No. She followed me out and we got married in—"

He stopped short, snapped his lips shut and glared at me for a full second.

"How did you find out?" he suddenly rasped.

I let my lung-clamped breath out slowly, shrugged, and tried to look very wise. And because zero hour seemed postponed a bit I casually dropped both hands to the bed and sort of rested the top half of me on them.

"The answers certain people gave me, and bull's-eye guesses," I told him truthfully. "Stella has been showing curves across the footlights for a long time. So

I asked a certain party who knows all about theatre people. He remembered seeing you with her plenty in those days. But he didn't know your name. He also saw you with her four weeks ago when you came out of the Kansas pen. He also remembered that Stella had taken two months off from the current show a bit after you left town. That and my guesses told me what I wanted to know. And know something else?"

HIS sneer was really good, but he was having a hard time holding it.

"You tell me, wise guy."

"Okay, so I will," I assured him. "While you were in the pen Stella fell over something pretty nice. A gooney kid who had a million bucks coming to him next birthday. That Stella was already hitched to you didn't bother a girl like Stella a bit. She'd come here when you went to the pen. With a millionaire husband screwy about her she could handle the situation any time you turned up—if and when you did. But dice rolled badly for her. You turned up *before* she could marry the kid. What to do? Tell me, did she tell you her plans? Make you an offer to buy you off?"

He started to nod his head, then checked himself, and bit off things about a girl that no gentleman says about even a girl like Stella.

"Thanks," I said. "So that's why she wanted to see me! To get me to get you out of the picture. And I've got a hunch how she figured I could do it. You were in a lot of things years ago. If Stella did a little talking, and I did a little hunting around, the law could nail you for more pen time for something even you had forgotten about. Right, Fraser? Isn't that right?"

I raised my voice on the last and leaned forward a little as though to compel him with my eyes to admit it was true. But that wasn't the idea in mind. It was simply to throw him more off balance while I got set for the do or die act.

"Isn't that right?" I repeated. "And you caught on. You saw what was in the wind for you. You tailed her and saw her meet me in the Blue Deer last night. Then you knew. She spotted you, and got cold feet on telling me then. She wanted to get away from you. She beat it to her place. And you were waiting for her. Right? One little word led to

another—and to that knife some guy sent her from New Guinea. Bingo! You'd carved her before you realized. Right, Fraser? That's the way it was, wasn't it? And now after killing a cheap double-crossing skirt in a fit of rage you want to add to it by killing a couple of others in cold blood! Why, of all the—"

I didn't finish the rest. I moved fast. I had hold of a hunting boot some guy had left jammed down between the mattress and the bunk sideboard. My eyes had been on Fraser's face every instant of the time. I saw fear, surprise, and wild rage battle for control of his features. His hand holding the gun was even trembling a little. I didn't wait an instant longer. I heaved that hunting boot his way, and catapulted off the bunk all in the same movement.

He probably saw both bits of action, but it was to the boot that he gave his attention. As I said, he wasn't a natural killer or he would have shot, regardless of the boot sailing at him through the air. But he didn't. He tried to duck, and turn away, and yank his gun around to bear again. Too late.

I smashed into him at the belt line by then. We both went off the table and down to the floor—me clawing for the wrist of his gun arm, and he trying to hammer the barrel on my head, and twist so that he wouldn't hit the boards on his back.

Well, he missed my head, and momentum carried the gun on down. I managed to get his wrist but before I could twist it out and away from me we struck the floor with me on top. The jar knocked my hand loose for an instant. And then something happened so fast that I wasn't able to do anything about it.

There was a roar of sound that almost blew my eardrums out and I felt a sharp stinging sensation at the collar line of my throat. Then my eyes and nose were full of discharged gun powder.

For an instant I really thought I'd at last stopped one for keeps. But I was not the victim. It was Fraser. He had shot himself through the front of the neck, and downward. The jar of hitting the floor, as we continued to grapple each other, had jammed the gun muzzle against his throat and forced him to pull the trigger.

I finally rolled off him, gagging for

breath, and got up onto my hands and knees. His blood was on both of us, but he didn't mind because he was dead. I must have looked silly on hands and knees there beside him, wheezing for air, tears streaming from my smarting eyes, and wagging my head to get the fog out of my brain. But anyway, I wasn't that way long. A gurgling gasp in back of me made me remember Betty Winton. I got up on my two feet, and turned around.

She was sitting on the bunk edge where I'd left her, and staring fixedly at me out of terror-stricken eyes. An instant later they seemed to clear a little when she saw that the wrong man hadn't got up. And then, the shock of all that

Some time later a Chet Lacey looking plenty disgusted, walked into Bierman's office at the Detective Bureau where I expected a hot session with Sol. Of course I'd known I'd have some explaining to do. What I didn't know was how Bierman would act after the way I had bungled things. True, Betty Winton had been a witness to that affair in the hunting camp, and she could back me up. But not for several days. She wasn't in any condition to talk to anybody. That's why I had left her at home, and driven back down town in her car to face Bierman alone.

Maybe I should have caught on from the funny look on his ugly map when I went into his office. But, I was too wor-



"I've Come to Talk to You About Murder—and You'd Better Talk, or—"

CHET LACEY glared fiercely at Mary Ellen Harris. It didn't mean a thing to him that she had reddish gold hair and the face of an angel. What mattered was that she had sent him a mysterious note, asking to see him—and that the bootblack, Tony, whom she had tipped a dollar to deliver the note, had been killed as a consequence.

Now Mary Ellen denied ever having sent the note.

"There must be some mistake," she said.

Chet Lacey knew she was lying. Her eyes told him so.

"If you don't talk," he said, "your note goes straight to the police!"

That did it. Frantically, Mary Ellen blurted out a story of blackmail, death threats and fearsome happenings that astonished even hard-boiled Chet Lacey—and sent him off on one of the most exciting crime chases of his life in *YOU WAKE UP DEAD*, next issue's novelet by Robert Sidney Bowen.

It's a worthy successor to "Death Has No Love-Life"—and you'll find thrills, action, suspense and surprises in every paragraph! *YOU WAKE UP DEAD* is an eye-opener—look forward to it!

had happened caught up with her. She went limp and fell over sideways.

I WAS sick about the whole affair. The last thing I wanted was Fraser dead. I had wanted to nail him alive so that he could talk more—to Sol Bierman. But, it was no soap. Proof of what I had figured and guessed correctly was there stiff on the floor, and getting stiffer by the minute. I wasn't even thankful that I was still alive. I was too sore at things in general to be thankful about anything.

I collected my gun from Fraser's pocket, helped Betty get herself straightened out some, then took her outside and drove her to her home.

ried, and too sore, to pay any attention to his face then. I just slumped into a chair, and fumbled for a cigarette while I stared moodily at the floor.

"I am a bum, Sol!" I suddenly blurted out. "A no good dope!"

"I've always said you were, pal," I heard him say. "Is that all you came in to tell me?"

Even then I missed it. The mile-wide wicked grin was on his face, when I glanced up. It didn't mean a thing to me. I nodded glumly, and then told him the whole story from start to finish.

I didn't leave out a single one of my dumb moves.

"That's the way it was, so help me,

Sol," I finished up. "I can't prove a thing because the guy's dead. Maybe Betty Winton's word might mean something to you, but . . . Well, this is your big moment. Oh, yeah, here! An anonymous contribution to the Police Fund. I don't feel I earned any part of it."

As I spoke the last I pulled out the five hundred dollars Stella Denton had given me and tossed it on Sol's desk. He looked at it, and then started shaking windows a block away with his laughter.

"My big moment, is right!" he said when he was through bellowing. "And how! That I should live to see the day a dime would get away from you for nothing. Bribe money, hey, pal? I could send you away for twenty years, at least."

He made me sore. "Go ahead!" I shouted. "And rats to you! At least I had the spunk to come in here and spill the works."

"A good thing you did come in, pal, or I might have been forced to send you up for twenty years," he said. "You see, I know all about it, myself. I was a witness, too."

It didn't dawn for a second. And then I almost fell off my chair.

"What?" I yelled. "You a witness?"

Bierman had to enjoy another good laugh before he would tell me.

"Most times you are a nice guy, Chester," he said, with that confounded grin on his face. "Sometimes you are even very clever. But once in a while you are terrible. Like this time. You were the third guy to go to her apartment, pal. Ten minutes after you left here I was sure of it. Your nosing around for news, was pathetic. But I knew you, see? So I gave you the break to clear up the thing your way. Lots of times letting

smart guys clear things up saves us the trouble. So I let you try to do it. But I kept my eye on you."

He paused for breath. "Yeah?" I said. "Yeah!" he said back to me. "You were not out of my sight for a minute, sweetheart. Ask me, and I can give you a detailed account of every step you took. However, it got tough when Fraser forced you into the Winton kid's car with the gun. I was afraid he saw my tail car, but I guess he didn't. When you turned into that camp road I parked and hiked cross lots. I figured the first deserted camp would be the spot. It was. You three were inside when I got there. I heard it all, pal. All of it. Saw most of it, too."

I had to choke a little before I could get the words out.

"That lug holding a gun on me, and you only watching, and listening?" I finally shouted. "You, are you a pal!"

"You got yourself into that jam, didn't you?" Sol was grinning at me again. "It was up to you to get yourself out. Anyway, let it be a lesson to you. Next time, tell Papa all, first. Well, Fraser is in the morgue and we let Winton out of here ten minutes ago. So you beat it too, pal. And remember, next time don't let it be like *this* time. Scram!"

I went out of Sol's office with a four alarm fire face, and feeling the utter chump. Pretty soon I felt much better, though. It was when I remembered a little something I had neglected to tell Bierman. It was about the five thousand bucks Betty Winton had promised to pay me the instant I got her sappy brother out of the clutches of the law. So I headed for my office, knowing that she was probably writing out the check right then.

Backache, Leg Pains May Be Danger Sign Of Tired Kidneys

If backache and leg pains are making you miserable, don't just complain and do nothing about them. Nature may be warning you that your kidneys need attention.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking excess acids and poisonous waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

If the 15 miles of kidney tubes and filters don't work well, poisonous waste matter stays in the blood. These poisons may start nagging backaches, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of

pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, a stimulant diuretic, used successfully by millions for over 50 years. Doan's give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from the blood. Get Doan's Pills. A.D.C.



A blond dish had Willie in her arms and her lips against his ear

TWO GRAND FINALE!

By JOE ARCHIBALD

When Willie Klump, the Hawkeye Hawkshaw, takes the trail of a kidnaped rich doll he sure finds himself toying with trouble!

GERTRUDE MUDGETT nudged Willie Klump, president of the Hawkeye Detective Agency, as they trudged along Lexington Avenue one day.

"Ain't it fun, window shoppin'?" she asked.

"If you need winders," Willie said wearily.

They arrived abreast of Grand Central

Station and wondered at the crowd, made up mostly of members of the distaff side, clogging the entrance.

"It is nowhere near five-fifteen," Willie said. "Look at the big limersine at the curb. It looks like some big shot might be around."

"I'll ask that cop," Gertie said, went up to the gendarme, and pulled at his sleeve. "Somebody comin'?"

"I shouldn't tell you, sister," the cop said. "It's that Gregory Cooper, arrivin' from Hollywood."

Gertie cut loose with a screech of delight and ran back to Willie.

"Hol' my bag, Sugar. Firs' let me have the autograft book out of it. Oh, it is lucky we come this far, Willie."

Willie Klump stood holding the bag and watching Gertie plunge into the milling mob of movie-struck maids like a rotary snow-plow attacking a nine-foot drift.

"None of the others has a chance," he said to the cop. "She will come out of there with Gregory Cooper's only white shirt and a handful of his locks."

"I wisht the squad cars would git here," the policeman gulped. "Oh, oh, too late, pal."

A terrific rhubarb followed. Two citizens got out of the limousine and one yelled at the other.

"Get the stretcher unfolded, Mike. Remember what happened to him in Shamokin!"

It was all too horrible and confusing to Willie Klump. The details would never be straight in his mind. The tangle of arms and legs finally poured out into Lexington and the sidewalk was littered with dames' hats, compacts, earrings and handbags.

Willie caught a glimpse of Gregory just before the Hollywood heartbreaker dived into the limousine. One of his sleeves was missing and his tasty, expensive cravat hung down from the back of his neck. One admiring female fan was clinging to the trunk when the jalopy roared toward Forty-Second.

"Willie!" a muffled voice called out. "Where are you, Willie?"

"Right where you left me."

Willie sniffed, and saw that Gertie's hat was down over her eyes and that she wore but one shoe. More than that, Gertie's skirt was missing, and Willie hated green slips.

"I got it, Willie. His autograft!"

A little whistling sound accompanied Gertie's words.

"YOU lost your swivel tooth, too," Willie said. "I never saw worst behavin' in a cattle car. He-e-e-ey, taxi!"

A cab came up and the driver looked at Gertie, grinned at Willie.

"She sure is on a bender, pal. An' at this time of day!"

"You slug that fresh mug or I will!" Gertie yelled.

"It'll have to be you," Willie choked out. "He didn't get them cauliflowers for ears by sellin' ribbons in Saks, Gertie. Now jus' git in the cab an' you'll be okay."

Gertrude Mudgett hit the cabby with a straight left, and once more a crowd gathered.

"Awright, babe," the cop said. "I know a desk sarge who wants your autograph. Climb into the police car an' you don't have to pay no fare. I stood enough!"

"Willie!"

"I will come down later an' give you a character reference," Willie Klump said, and ducked into Grand Central. "What a character!"

He went uptown to his office and fell into his chair.

"It is a break for the F.B.I. she does not foller criminal instincts," he mumbled. "It can happen awful quick when she's around. We was just walkin' along an' bliff!"

The mailman came in and dropped a letter on Willie Klump's desk. "Don't look important," he said, and plucked a comic book out of Willie's wire basket. "Mind if I read this 'fore I go? I'm foolish about Li'l Dabney."

"Go right ahead," Willie said, and slit his letter open. It said:

Dear Sir:

Why not be a private detective? Make big money! Get out of the rut! Even YOU can learn this fascinating profession in less than two months! Write at once!

"Ha ha!" the letter carrier laughed.

"It is none of your business," Willie said in a temper.

"I was laffin' at Li'l Dabney, Klump. You're awful sensitive."

The mailman seemed hurt himself and went out and slammed the door.

The phone rang. It was Gertie. "Look, William Klump!" she yelled. "I am not just somewheres gettin' a henna rinse. I got to have a hun'ed dollars bail as I also hit the policemen on the way here. I called my boss but she is outa town, an' the banks are closed!"

"Where would I git a hundred dollars?" Willie wanted to know. "You got all my— You call Satchelfoot?"

"Natch. I can't locate him, Willie. If I have to stay locked up overnight,

you better leave town before noon tomorrow."

"I'll see," Willie sighed. He immediately called Headquarters. He told them down there he had to reach "Satchelfoot" Kelly at once as it was a matter of life and death.

"Kelly? He's gone uptown t' see the parents of that Vandergrip dame, Willie."

"Who is she?"

"Where you been all day? The papers are full of it. Klump, you kill me!" A phone went back on its cradle.

Willie slapped on his hat and ran out. A block from the office he snatched up a newspaper from a stand. The headlines were three inches high.

VANDERGRIP HEIRESS KIDNAPED Father Gets Ransom Note!

Willie hurriedly gobbled up the fine print with his bugged eyes until he came to an address on West End Avenue.

"If you like it, maybe you'll buy it, huh?" the newsdealer snapped at Willie.

"It's not a late edition," Willie said, and started for the subway. "So the doll was snatched, huh? I can git killed if I don't find Satchelfoot!"

He went up the East Side to the Ninties and grabbed a crosstown bus. A half-hour later he was arguing with four hefty cops outside an apartment on West End Avenue. One of them finally ran in to get Kelly.

"You better see the dope, Kelly," Willie heard him shout. "Somethin' terrible must of happened. Your wife got run over or your house burnt down!"

"I ain't got either one," Satchelfoot yipped, but followed the cop out. "You! Willie, you get the heck out or I'll run you in!"

"Satchelfoot, I got to have a hundred bucks t' spring Gertie. She—"

"An' a crook wants twenty-five grand fore he turns this Vandergrip chick loose!" Kelly roared. "I've changed my mind about you, Willie. We need all the help we can use on this job an' all the luck, and that is all you got, luck! Stick around awhile, anyway."

THERE were two fond parents in the apartment hugging each other close and Satchelfoot Kelly went back to briefing them again. Philander K. Vandergrip owned a railroad and three square blocks of real estate just off Gramercy

Park and his laundry bill alone was eight hundred dollars a month.

P.K. was not concerned over the amount of the bite. Why, he'd spent that much in one afternoon at the Jamaica track. In fact, he'd already sent it to the rough character's contact man. But just ten minutes ago he had received another "or else" epistle. This time he was to dig up fifty G's.

"Crooks are a selfish lot," Willie commented.

"Now le's go over it ag'in," Kelly said. "She left the joint here two days ago with her bag packed. Was goin' to visit a dame on Long Island."

"That's right," the old doll dripping with Tiffany crockery gushed out tearfully. "Oh, my poor Venida. I wish we'd bought her that mink coat, now. We've been too hard on her, Philander. If we'd just let her have two sport coupes!"

"I never heard nobody gettin' more abused," Kelly said.

"My po-o-or baby!" Philander wailed.

"If that is her pitcher there, she sure is some baby!" Willie observed.

"Nobody ast you, Willie," Satchelfoot snapped. "This is no place or time for cheap bandage. Now, you should both bring us into strict confidants an' tell everythingin'."

"We don't know anythin'," Corbina Vandergrip screeched. "An' if we did, you think we'd tell the police so's she would get murdered?"

"Well, maybe she eloped with somebody, is all," Satchelfoot suggested, and Philander Vandergrip tore at his hair and forgot he wore a toupee.

"I told you I've already paid over twenty-five thousand dollars, you fat-head!"

"Let's start over," Willie said.

"We will search her room," Kelly said.

"There might be a clue as to who she was goin' around with of late."

"You see, Corbina," P.K. sighed. "We'd better pay the other fifty thousand."

"You do, and they'll ask for a hundred thousand, Philander," Venida's ma yelped. "Let's put a stop to it somewhere. We must hold on awhile longer and maybe they'll get scared and be satisfied with what they have."

Willie stood by and watched Kelly and his men case Venida's boudoir. He thought something was quite significant and said so.

"Look at all the pitchers of movie stars, mostly of Humbert Bogard. She must have an awful crush on the boom-boom boy."

"Maybe you expected a dame's walls to be covered with pitchers of Lana Temple, huh?" Kelly snorted. "There's no use wastin' time here. Willie, take your maulers out of that box of choc'lates or I'll break off your arm. We'll go back downtown, boys, an' see what the D.A. wants t' do next."

"I forgot somethin', Satchelfoot," Willie mumbled. "I wisht I could think what it was."

When they got back to the sunken living room, they found the Vandergrips very remorseful indeed.

"No use tryin' t' crosst bridges you burned behind you," Satchelfoot said. "The stable was locked after the horse was stole!"

"Don't you dare call my daughter a horse, you thick-skulled flatfoot!" P.K. Vandergrip yelled.

"Oh, it is only a figment of speech," Kelly protested. "I was only tryin' to—"

"Open your big mouth an' take your foot out, Satchelfoot," Willie sniffed.

"Yes, for heaven's sake, don't just stand there," Corbina tossed out, and reached for a dry hankie. "Go get the criminals!"

"I expect a letter from them any minute givin' me their address," Satchelfoot Kelly said scornfully. "I never saw worst corporation with cops."

"I never saw worst cops," Vandergrip yowled. "Oh, now I'm talking like they do, Corbina. Where's that fifty-cent bottle I put down a minute ago, an' that cigar of old rye. I mean—Gad, this is awful!"

Corbina Vandergrip called the butler in.

"Show these persons out. They are no help to anybody, Miffin!"

"Cops gettin' evicted," Willie sighed. "It don't seem right, Satchelfoot."

BEFORE the butler let them out, Miffin said *sotto voce*:

"If you knew Venida, you wouldn't worry so much, gentlemen, not about her. I feel sorry for the criminals. Gracious me, jazz records, movie magazines, and even comic books."

"Hep cat, huh?"

"But don't quote me," Miffin said as he nodded.

"Let him pay through the nose," Satchelfoot growled. "There's room enough in his schnozzola to stash fifty grand. If one thing I hate it is kipnapin's. You go about your own business, Willie!"

It was very late that night when William Klump awoke in a very cold sweat.

"Gertie!" he yelped. "Well, it is too late now. I wish I'd stop forgettin'. I'll pack a bag first thing in the mornin' an' go up to the Catskills until she cools off."

William Klump was leaving his rooming house, straw suitcase in hand when the landlady called him back.

"Call for you, Klump! A girl, and she sounds happy over somethin'."

"Wha-a-a?" Willie went back into the hall and picked up the dangling receiver. "H'lo."

"This is Gertie, Willie. When I was in that hoosegow for awhile, I thought of somethin' I heard while getting a tweeze at the beauty parlor. A Mrs. Fogarty braggin' about how many nylon stockin's her husband brought her. Who is Mr. Fogarty but the desk sergeant where I was retained! So I talked to Fogarty and asked could he prove he wasn't takin' hot nylons from somebody."

Willie sighed deeply. "After me runnin' all over town lookin' for bail, Gert. I wisht you'd think of me oncet in awhile."

"Oh, you poor darlin', Willie," Gertie gurgled. "I'll make it up to you by payin' for the dinner you'll take me out to next Friday night. I've been awful!"

"Nobody's perfect," Willie said. "I'm willin' t' fergit."

Two days later, while Willie was busy with a skip tracing job, the Vandergrip case became grim indeed. The cops picked up a cadaver near a Harlem River coal-pocket, and it was identified as the remains of a cab driver named Frankie Yargo.

The cab, with his photo in it, was located eight blocks away, and the cops vacuumed it from radiator cap to tail-light and found the stub of a cigarette stained with lipstick and bearing the initials "V.V." Right away the grabbing of the Vandergrip heiress and the snuffing out of Yargo were tied together. There were not many dames in New York with the initials, V.V.

Willie tossed the newspaper aside, and grabbed for notepaper and pencil. Thoughts with Willie were as transient

as hddle-footed hoboos, and the moment they occurred to him they had to be put down in black and white.

No. 1. They had to knock off the hack-driver because he was the only one knew where Venida was taken to. Well, it is Kelly's headache as I got to find my client's customer who moved away with a pianer he owed three more instalments on.

No. 2. It is a good thing I thought of this. The Vandergrips won't corporate with real cops. They might listen t' me. I'll go right now.

So Willie went up to see the Vandergrips, and while Miffin kept his foot in the door, Willie said:

"You got to have somebody lookin' for the doll. I am a private cop, don't fergit. I ask you, do I look like a policeman?"

"I won't answer that," Miffin said, and bore Willie's card into the Vandergrip parlor. He came out holding a derby hat that looked very familiar to Willie. "That Kelly person called a few minutes ago and forgot it, Klump. If you happen to see him—by the way, you can come in."

"They'll see me, huh?" Willie enthused, and then a harsh voice spun him around.

"Nobody'll see you fer a year an' a day, Willie Klump!" Satchelfoot howled. "It is a crime to—you fire or I'll stop!"

"Shoot—an' go ahead," Willie cried out, and ran for the back stairway.

He finally got down to the basement, went out the back way and scaled a fence. He took shelter in a doghouse in the back yard of a Riverside Drive pueblo until a pooch the size of a goat got a yen for some shut-eye. When Willie finally came out on Ninety-seventh street, he wished he had his other pair of blue serge pants. The ones he wore felt twenty percent cooler inside than they should have.

"It ain't my day," Willie sighed, and made his way across town. "Well, I better keep outa this rhubarb an' maybe Kelly will fergit to invoke my license. This should teach me a well-deserved lesson."

FRIDAY night, Gertrude Mudgett and Willie walked into an Italian restaurant on East Forty-six, and Willie was not happy about the whole thing.

"You know I don't care for spaghetti, Gert. Now, there is a place over on the nex' block where they got goulash an'—"

"Who is payin' for this chow, Willie Klump?"

"You. But—"

"Then shut up. I never saw such a sap. A girl has to buy his dinner fer him, an' he squawks where he'll eat. You ought t' be ashamed of yourself!"

"I only said—"

"I ain't deaf! I know what you said, Willie."

"Look, we're blockin' the door, Gert. There is customers want to get in."

"Yeah, sister," a husky citizen said. "No two-hour parkin'."

"Smart Alec, huh?"

"Look, Gert, for oncet, let's not get in a jam."

"This is a free country," Gertrude Mudgett snapped. "I'll stand here as long as I please. Ignore 'em, Willie."

"Okay, babe!" the hungry character snapped. "I'm comin' through. Look out for your fenders!"

Whango!

William Klump was out in the street when Gertie's handbag caved in the man's new Homberg. Willie was hiding in the rear of a tavern when he heard the police whistle.

"Well, it was about time I got smart," Willie said, and took a package of sandwiches out of his pocket.

Then he ordered a beer. He was finishing his emergency rations when Gert stormed into the tavern and asked for a man answering his description. Willie sneaked out into the kitchen.

"Who are you, pal?" a crude person wielding a dishtowel said. "Get back in there 'fore I heave you in."

"Look," Willie said. "I couldn't pay my check. If I don't wash some dishes I will git arrested. Please, let me wash some dishes!"

Two hours later, Willie was still leaning over the sink. The dishes kept piling up.

"You'd think I'd et ten steaks with lobsters on the side. I'll see the labor board about this. . . ."

The newspapers, Willie observed the next morning, were climbing the frames of New York's finest. Nothing had been done about the snatching of Venida Vandergrip or the erasure of Frankie Yargo. The Vandergrips still insisted on clamping up even when the F.B.I. ops put them on the grill. According to the upper bracket, he had paid another fifty G's over to the illegitimate guardians of

his pride and joy, and he would pay another hundred for her safe return. P.K. asked the cops right out how many kidnaped citizens had ever been brought back alive.

While Willie was absorbed in the story, his client called him on the phone.

"Never mind workin' on the deal no more, Klump. And if you want to perfect the public, take your name out of the classified. If the Empire State Buildin' was stole while you was in one of its elevators, the crooks would hide it before you learned it was missing. In short, you are a dope an' you are fired!"

"That twenty-five bucks was peanuts anyways," Willie countered. "Worryin' about one pianer when you can sell a hundred more at scalper's prices. G'bye!"

Willie wondered if jobs were hard to get.

"It is my luck I was Four F," he moaned. "I would be a Fifty-two-twenty right now."

During lunch hour he heard Gertie hailing him. He spotted her and started running, but she caught him trying to hop a big moving van.

"Stop, Willie! I guess I was wrong the other night. Until I'm sure, let's be frien's, huh? Walk over to Madison with me as there is the swelles' dinin' room suit in a winder there. It is time we started thinkin' of gittin' hitched."

"I wonder if Stalin has the atom bomb," Willie asked quickly.

"Was you changin' the subject on purpose, Willie Klump?" Gertie snapped, then gave him an affectionate shove that nearly knocked him into the gutter. "It is because I have such a crush on you, I treat you like I do, Willie."

"When you start hatin' me, give me at least two weeks' notice," Willie said, shuddering.

IN MADISON, near Forty-sixth, it happened. Gertie suddenly let out a delighted warhoop and bolted.

"It is Humbert Bogard!" she trebled, and before Willie could say eel, three hundred noon-hour stenogs rushed toward the well-groomed citizen ogling shirts in a store window.

"Here we go ag'in," Willie sighed, and covered his face with his hands.

It was horrifying. "I ain't Bogard!" a desperate gravelly voice howled. "Leave go my coat! It's a mistake, you goofy dames. I'll start swingin'! I'll—Awright,

here's an autograph. Now lemme outa here!"

"He should call the cops," Willie said, and opened his eyes. The cops were moving in, billy clubs swinging, the dolls scampering. The victim of the riot staggered out into the street and climbed aboard a taxi.

"He looks like Bogard," Willie said, and Gertie came running, waving a folded sheet of paper. "I got it, Willie. Now all I need is Karloff's. Ain't he got the nicest handwritin'?"

Willie Klump took a gander at the autograph. Suddenly he opened the sheet up and saw that it was a dunning note from a landlord and had been issued quite recently.

"You'd think Bogard would pay his rent, Gert. Ah, this bill ain't made out to him. It is to a gee named Harlow Hogan."

"Wha-a-a-a? Oh, he is incog, Willie, that is what. He writ his own name for me though. I wisht I was Bracall."

"Me too," Willie said. "Tsk-tsk!"

"Oh, yeah? Maybe I'm a squaw, huh?"

"Don't lead me on," Willie snapped.

"Well, you can't blame them movie stars. Landlords would maybe ast them to stay incog some places so's the dames wouldn't tear 'em down. But why don't he pay up, Gertie? He is three months in the rears."

"He ain't had a pitcher for almost a year, Willie. Oh, I gotta run. I'm ten minutes late now."

William Klump went back to his office, still lunchless. He found a slice of cold toast in his file cabinet, brewed some nescafe over a burner and nibbled while he took up where he'd left off in the newspaper.

Two sticks on page 3 drew Willie's eye. They said that Humbert Bogard, Paragon's biggest meal ticket, was doing some hunting up in Yakima Bend, Oregon, and not for shapely does. Bogard was taking a much needed sabbatical until he started production on his next thriller, "The Morgue Is Full."

Willie was puzzled. Even Houdini had never been able to be in two places at the same time. It would be silly for anybody to fly to N. Y. from Oregon just to look at shirts in a window for a few minutes. Willie shuddered. He thought of Venida Vandergrip, and delved into his pocket for Bogard's autograph. A good thing Gertie forgot it. It was sel-

dom that ideas in Willie's head ever associated with each other, but now they were ganged together and buzzing very neighborly.

"Won't hurt t' find out. But I got to to watch Satchelfoot," Willie muttered. "H-m-m. 'For the rent of Apartment Twelve C, Morningside Mews.'"

He picked up his hat and hurried out. He went up to the Vandergrip apartment and begged to be let in. Finally Corbina Vandergrip softened. Willie asked if Venida wrote letters to movie Romeos and her ma said of course. Willie asked if he could go into Venida's boudoir and study the autograph on Humbert Bogard's picture. He could.

When he went out, P. K. said:

"I'll pay anybody two thousand dollars if he gets a clue. You got one?"

"I think so," Willie gulped. "Two G's? I am sure I better have one."

Willie went up to Morningside Mews and hunted up the superintendent. When he located the man, he flashed his badge, and put on a stern tone.

"I am a detective, and don't say what you are thinkin' as it is how I fool everybody. You will call up Twelve C and say you are sending up a decorator to see if the joint needs plasterin'. Don't take no for no answer."

"It's a coincidence, Klunk. I was just readin' a detective book when you come in."

"Klunk is the name."

Ten minutes later, Willie was admitted to the apartment by the ringer for Humbert Bogard. There was another flashily dressed gee lolling on a couch. Willie looked at the bottle and the two glasses on the table, and sniffed at the ozone.

"Sure is sweet-smellin' rye, boys."

"Look, Bub, take a squint around and then lam. We don't care if they decorate or not. Any plasterin' to be done, we do the job on ourselves. Ha!"

"We are specially interested in the bedroom," Willie said. "Maybe a mauve job with green trimmin's. Your wife around?"

"What wife? Look, stupid, we like where we sleep. What you gapin' at?"

"You read movie magazines?"

"What's it to you?"

WILLIE thought a man of Harlow Hogan's type should not bite his fingernails. The other character was as

jumpy as a kangaroo court. There was a sound in the next room and something tipped over and hit the floor.

Harlow Hogan dragged in his breath, and the guy on the couch said: "That pooch!"

Willie's alimentary canal tightened up. He was sure his hunch was right, and he was scared.

"Ha, I've heard her referred to as a horse. Now she's a pooch."

"What was that, pal? Say, you want t' bet ten bucks you ain't a decorator?"

"I'd win easy," Willie said. "I mean—"

"Eggy, this is a flatfoot. Somehow he knows the works."

"My doll collects autographs," Willie said. "The one you give her this aft is a phony. You are Harlow Hogan and are not incog. You kidnaped Venida Vandergrip and she is in there. You brought her here in a cab an' then knocked off Frankie Yargo, the driver. If you wa'n't hoggish like all other criminals, you would have lammed with the seventy-five G's. Now it is too late."

"Yeah, you git a hun'ed percent, pal," Hogan said, and whipped out a Betsy. There was a lump under the lapel of Eggy's pin-stripe and Willie knew it was not caused by a goitre. "Only you git zero on the report card," Hogan said. "Do you think you'll ever git out of here as warm as when you come in?"

"If I don't, I'll lose two G's," Willie said. "It is no use as the joint is surrounded!"

"Huh?" Hogan gulped. And he had no sooner let the word jump out when a siren screamed outside.

"Ah, I told you," Willie sighed, as surprised as the crooks. "Give up?"

"Hah? Ninety-nine years an' the chair besides?" Harlow Hogan yelled. "We will fight it out, Eggy."

"I wish you wouldn't be so foolish," Willie said, oozing fright dew.

"I got a hunch he's bluffin', Hogan," Eggy sniffed. "Sure, was we dumb? Would them cops come blowin' a siren? Le's murder this bum!"

"What can we lose, huh?"

"No shootin'," Eggy said. "I'll git the bottle. Then we'll drive him down t' the old barge an' mix up two cement blocks. You keep the Roscoe on him until I bat out his brains."

Willie told himself he had to do something. Why, this was real, and he wasn't just sitting in Loew's Lex watching Bo-

gard eradicate a pet aversion! But there was nothing he could do. Harlow Hogan's Betsy was pointing at his vital organs. There was nothing nearer at hand more lethal than a plastic ash tray.

"This is it, Willie! Leave you face it. You will get a posthumorous medal from the Commissioner. How many times do you think you can be lucky? You been a lucky stiff!"

"Awright, Eggy, let him have it!"

"G'bye, Gert!" Willie said, just as the door caved in!

Five burly cops rushed in and started a barrage and Willie hit the carpet, sure as anything that there were six holes in the crown of his hat. The last one was close and gave him a headache.

"No, you don't!" Satchelfoot Kelly screeched, and then came down with a crash, but not alone.

All the police and Eggy trampled Willie as the grim game of cops and robbers progressed, and after awhile there was a last defiant cuss word from a criminal person, and then all was still.

"Willie, speak to me!" Satchelfoot pleaded.

"Hello, Satchelfoot. How did you know?"

Willie gave himself a little amateur osteopathy and found he would not have to look over his shoulder for the rest of his life.

"Why? Well, I been suspectin' you'd stick your puss in this case. We went up an' checked at the Vandergrips and we found that rent bill on the floor. What beats the aitch out of me is how did Humbert Bogard's autograph git on it?"

"It was counterfeit," Willie sighed, as they lifted him to his feet. "Gertie got it from him."

"He's still out on his feet," Kelly said. "Le's wait until he gits his marbles picked up."

"That is the truth," Willie said. "But break in that bedroom an' git Venida out."

"She ain't been murdered?"

"Keep your fingers crossed, Satchelfoot," Willie choked out. "I wouldn't say yes or no. Git me that bottle of rye as instead of a liquidator it is now a life saver. It is better to git a big head from what's in it than from what it is made of outside."

"Is he goofy, Satchelfoot? You knowed him a long time."

"It is hard t' tell, Mac," Kelly said.

"But sometimes I wisht I was as cracked. Awright, le's git that door!"

THEY found Venida tied up worse than the trucking business during the strike, and she had a gag in her mouth. The blonde asked first for Willie.

"The man who came here—first. I—want to give him a big kiss!"

"There he is," Satchelfoot snapped. "You sure you are that grateful, babe?"

Venida was. "Oh, you wonderful, brave man!" she gurgled.

Willie's ears wiggled. "Tastes like wintergreen," he said, and grinned.

"I've been an awful stupe," Venida said. "Could I have a belt of that bottle?"

"Ain't no chaser handy," Willie said.

"I've been chased enough," Venida sighed, and tipped the bottle.

"Well, you better be gittin' home to papa," Willie said. "You are a cinch fer a mink coat, sister."

"Wait," Kelly said. "How did this all happen, kid? I just added up an' I'm thinkin' of all them pitchers you got of Bogard in your boudoir. An' this gent on the floor, the late Harlow Hogan is a ringer for him. See what I'm gittin' at?"

Venida sang. "Well, I started out for Long Island, and stopped at the Park Royal for a cocktail. Who is sitting at the bar but this man and right away I was sure he was Humbert Bogard. He knew I thought so and he made out he was. I could have passed right out."

"Too bad you didn't, Venida," Willie said. "Go on."

"He says, 'Don't be afraid of me, lady. I'm not as bad as I look in pictures. You're Venida Vandergrip as I remember my secretary showing me the letters you wrote. Look, I'm havin' a little party uptown where I'm staying. Garfield Johnson, Van Grant, an' maybe Joan Colbert and Ronny Powers are coming over. You'll like them, I'm sure.'"

"What a pitch," Satchelfoot said, shaking his head. "You should have talked to Barnum, sister."

"I don't like him, Willie," Venida said, nodding at Satchelfoot.

"We should become great pals," Willie grinned. "Then what?"

"Well, I went up there—in a cab, Willie. Then I found out the score."

"Yeah," Willie said. "Eighty to nothing in the last half of the ninth against

you, Venida, huh? But they wa'n't figurin' the team of Klump and Mudgett had their cuts left. 'Gertie is my doll, and she collects autographs. Harlow's is worth two G's. When I read the real Bogard was huntin' four-legged dears in Oregon I knew he couldn't be shoppin' on Madison. It just didn't make no sense. So—"

Venida grabbed Willie again and kissed him just as a newspaper man snapped a picture.

"Willie," Satchelfoot said in a threadbare voice, "I don't know how you do it, an' neither do you, but tell me sometime. Anythin' left in that bottle, Mac? . . ."

Gertie Mudgett picked up her favorite tabloid the next morning. Gertie always looked at the pictures first, and hardly bothered with the captions. She saw a picture of Willie Klump, apparently at a wild party—why, two guests were even on the floor—and a blond dish had Willie in her arms and her lips against Willie's ear. There were cops there and they seemed to be ready to move in and raid the orgy. Gertie threw the sheet aside, barged out of the one-armed eating establishment and hailed a cab.

Willie got tipped off by the elevator operator.

"She's waitin' there, Mr. Klump. With a baseball bat, league size. Say, how about your autograph, Mr. Klump?"

"Tell the cops to pick her up," Willie sighed. "She only looks at pitchers. I'll send one or two over. Tell 'em to make her read what it says under the pitcher. Here's the key to my office. They can put her in there an' I will call her from a drug store in about a half-hour."

"She's a character, Mr. Klump, isn't she?"

"Eggsentric," Willie said, and hurried away.

He called Gertie up later.

"Oh, you darlin', Willie. Two thousand dollars! Now nothin' can stop us from gettin' married, can it?"

"Oh, I'll think of somethin'," Willie said. "I mean, to invest it in. I'll be—right over, Gert."

"Maybe Mr. Vandergrip can put it where she can't use it," Willie said to himself. "I'll ask him what escrow is. Oncet money is there, I've heard, it takes a lawyer to get it out. Huh, I thought I won."

When racketeer Boom Boom Tortoni tries to use Willie Klump and Gertie Mudgett to alibi him out of a gang killing, the Hawkeye Hawkshaw finds himself in a spot that calls for some fast brainwork—and Boom Boom's plan proves to be a boom-boomerang in

KILROY RIDES AGAIN

Another Hilarious Story

By JOE ARCHIBALD

Coming in the Next Issue!

CAN YOUR SCALP PASS THE

***F-N TEST?**



*The Famous
Finger Nail Test

1 "It's F-N, the test for men!" Scratch your head—if you find dryness or loose dandruff you need Wildroot Cream-Oil. Buy the large economy size.

YOUR HAIR CAN LOOK
LIKE THIS WITH NEW
**WILDROOT
CREAM-OIL**

2 Only a little Wildroot Cream-Oil can do a big job for your hair. Keeps your hair well groomed all day long without a trace of that greasy, plastered down look! Get Wildroot Cream-Oil from your barber or toilet goods counter.



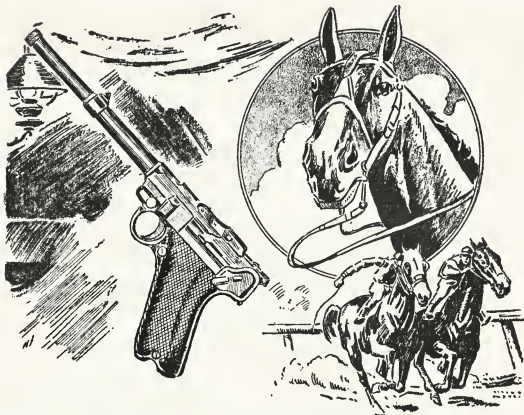
CREAM-OIL CHARLIE
SAYS: "IT CONTAINS
LANOLIN!"

3 And TUNE IN:
2 NETWORK
SHOWS! "The
Adventures of
Sam Spade" Sun-
evenings, CBS
Network; "King
Cole Trio Time"
Sat. afternoons,
NBC Network.





Street pushed him a little, and Thurman got my bullet in his ample middle



SOUVENIR FROM SAIPAN

By J. LANE LINKLATER

Pete Lawton, returned war hero and ex-bookie, heads straight for the racetrack to repay some debts, but when his longshot ticket comes home he finds the payoff's made in murder coin!

CHAPTER I

Dead Man in the Suite

THE dawn was turning to a light-gray under the influence of a distant sun as I moved toward the group of cars parked just against the brick wall of the Rocky Shore race-track.

I stopped by a smartly polished limousine, poked my head in the open window and read the card around the steering-wheel.

The owner, it said, was Dave Thurman.

I opened the rear door, stepped in and sat down. I snapped a cigarette out of my trick case, popped it between my lips and touched a light to it. I puffed peacefully. The early morning was quiet and serene. Trainers and jockeys and rubrag men were busy beyond the clubhouse, but they were out of sight.

Presently a small group of men emerged from the clubhouse and stood chatting. Then one of them broke away

AN EXCITING CRIME ACTION NOVELET

and walked briskly toward the limousine. He was a big man, big-chested, big-bodied. He was hatless, and the morning sun glinted on his slicked-down hair.

The man had yanked open the door and squeezed his paunch under the wheel before he saw me.

He swung his head quickly. His reddish eyebrows went up. His pale blue eyes distended.

"Lawton!" The word came hard, the air in his throat choking it. "Pete Lawton! What are you doing here?"

"Take it easy, Thurman," I said, and grinned at his panic. I jerked my head toward the track. "I've been watching the horse."

"But you shouldn't have been permitted on the track!"

"Pretty hard to keep me out, Thurman. Yes, I've been watching your horse, Burley's Bride. She should win the big race today. Fifty thousand dollars!"

A sudden release of air in Thurman's chest pushed the words out spasmodically:

"What do you want?"

"Just fifty thousand dollars." I grinned again. "That horse—you practically stole her from my old friend, Hal Kelso. In fact, you practically stole his entire stable!" I shook my head. "That was after I left. That was December eighth, nineteen-forty-one. Years ago. Since then you took Hal Kelso to the cleaners, and it killed him—especially losing that one horse. So, as I told you when I phoned you last night—"

"You're crazy!" spluttered Thurman.

"It left Joyce Kelso penniless, too," I went on. "Yes, that horse should win this afternoon. Fifty thousand!"

"Get out of my car!" squeaked Thurman. Even his eyebrows seemed to be twisted in fright. He glanced toward the clubhouse and shouted: "Frank!"

A MAN in the uniform of a track policeman broke away from the group and stalked toward us.

"So," I said, "that fifty thousand will go to Joyce Kelso! I'll handle the deal. Tell your man Street I'll be at his place at noon to arrange the details."

Thurman wriggled out from under the wheel and spilled out of the car. I got out, too, and confronted him.

"Don't forget," I warned him. "Tell Street to be ready to fix up the deal."

Thurman yanked a gun from under his coat. He was shaking violently.

"You can't do this to me!" he shouted.

I grabbed his wrist and twisted. Dave Thurman was a big man, bulky, but I am tall and bony, and I was war-toughened. I twisted more. The cracking of a bone was audible. Thurman yelped in agony and he dropped his gun. I slammed him in the chest and he wobbled backwards and over on his neck.

The track policeman was coming on the run. I turned to meet him. The officer charged. I dodged and slapped the fellow against the side of the head, so that, being off balance, he skidded over and his face scraped up the gravel of the parking lot.

I wheeled and hurried toward a low-slung coupe. I got in and drove away, fast. The track policeman, on his feet again, fired at the car, but it was much too late. . . .

It was eight o'clock. The hotel dining room was quiet and comfortable, pleasing to the eye. I was sitting at a table near a window. The morning sun streaked in and tickled sparks out of the gleaming silverware on the table.

"We'll get it!" I said.

The girl across the table from me studied me, quietly anxious. Joyce Kelso was sprucely tailored. She was bright, with a clean early-morning glamour. I couldn't quite get used to the sight of this competent, well-groomed young woman who somehow combined efficiency with an appeal that had nothing to do with office procedure.

"Yes," I repeated, "we'll get that fifty thousand!"

"I wish you hadn't started this, Pete," Joyce said. "I don't need the money. And Thurman is a bad one. He'll get you first if he can."

She could have been right. But I liked it this way. If it wasn't hazardous, it wasn't interesting. It was on the record that I had been pretty good at Princeton, which was something no one would have suspected to look at me. Then, after Princeton, the races attracted me, and I became a large-scale bookie, which even a stranger would have believed of me instantly.

My war experience had changed me, though. The bookie business no longer satisfied me. If anyone else wanted it, okay; but for myself I wanted something that gave me more of a feeling of being

useful. What? I didn't know yet. Maybe I never would. I knew only that it had to be something hazardous.

A waiter came and put down a plate of toast. It was cut very thin, and sliced into wafers.

"I don't understand," Joyce said, "just how you have any legal claim on the money."

I nibbled on my toast. "A few weeks before I got into uniform," I said, "your father was hard up for cash. He was a swell guy and a great horseman, but a flop as a businessman. I happened to have plenty and advanced him what he needed. He insisted that I take a mortgage on his entire stable.

"A few months later he was in a worse fix than ever. The war had closed the tracks down and he was stuck. Heavy expenses, nothing coming in. He phoned me long distance—I was in camp out West. Seemed he could get the money from Dave Thurman, but of course Thurman wanted a first mortgage, and your father knew I already held a mortgage on the stable. So I told your father to go ahead with Thurman, and that I'd tear up my mortgage."

Joyce wrinkled her fine smooth brow. "But how does that help?"

I grinned maliciously. "Well, I trusted your father, but not Thurman. I figured Thurman wasn't interested in just the interest on his money, that he was really after the stable. So I did not tear up my mortgage!"

JOYCE whistled a couple of expressive notes.

"So your mortgage predates the one held by Thurman!"

"Right, my child! And it's a cinch it gives us grounds for court action, and Thurman wouldn't want that. I called him last night and told him. Then I saw him at the track this morning. He's scared!"

"Yes," Joyce said gently. "But he's the kind that's especially dangerous when he's scared. He's got a pretty rough bunch of cutthroats working for him. You'd better stay away from dark alleys."

"I like dark alleys," I said.

Joyce sighed and stood up. I got up, too. Her slender, graceful figure disturbed me. I took her extended hand and held it for a moment. I found it surprisingly pleasant.

"I still don't like this, Pete," she said, and smiled. "I could get along without the money. And it makes me a little afraid."

I watched her leave the dining room, and I didn't move an inch until she was out of sight.

I had a small suite up on the seventh floor. Before going up, I strolled out to the lobby and slipped into a phone booth, called a number.

A woman's voice answered.

"Good morning, Mrs. Hanna," I said. "Is Si there?"

"Oh, no," said the woman. "Is this Mr. Lawton? Well, Si left here some time ago."

I stiffened. "Why so early?"

"Why, you called before. Don't you remember? It was over an hour ago. You said for me to tell Si you wanted him to call on you at eight o'clock. Si was in bed. I went up and woke him up and told him."

"Thank you," I said.

So someone had phoned Si Meeder's landlady, pretending to be me! Si himself would not have been deceived by the voice, but a good imitation could easily have deceived old Mrs. Hanna.

I rode the elevator to the seventh floor, trod the carpeted corridor swiftly, unlocked the door of my sitting room and walked in.

Si Meeder was there.

Si was a tall, slender man with a thin face that somehow seemed a little wistful. The wistfulness, I thought, came from an ever-present interest in the ladies that never quite resulted in anything. He was dressed, as usual, in a natty brown suit of hard-finished material. His white and tan shoes were distinctly flashy.

But Si Meeder was not, as would have been usual, pacing slowly around the room. Si was on the floor. Part of his head had been blown away.

At that moment I think my lips moved in silent and intense hate. I had been very fond of Si Meeder. Nobody had known that, unless it was old Mrs. Hanna. In the years gone by, it had been common talk that I, Pete Lawton, and Si Meeder were definitely unfriendly.

That had been an act, deliberately played by both of us, to enable Si to circulate freely among those who were not friendly to me. Si had been useful to me in that way. And I had

planned to use Si in the same way now.

I thought, bitterly, that it had been in my service that Si had lost his life. Someone, obviously, had learned the truth about our secret relationship.

I started to kneel by the body when I heard a key turning in the lock.

The door opened. Three men came in. I knew them all by sight—Wylie, the hotel manager, Baxter, the house detective, and Joe, the bellhop.

Wylie, pink-faced and well-scrubbed, paled as he saw the body on the floor. He stared with quick suspicion at me and edged toward the phone on the desk.

"Watch things, Baxter," he croaked, "while I get the police."

Baxter moved his ponderous weight toward me.

"You're a fool, Lawton," the detective said. "Plugging the guy in your own room. You got sore, huh, and lost your head?"

"I just came in," I said coldly. "He was here. Someone killed him in my absence."

Baxter grinned. "Your room door was wide open, huh?"

THERE was something I could have said on that point, but I thought it might help to hold something back.

"No," I said, "my door was not open, but it wouldn't be too hard to get a key. A bellhop could arrange it."

Joe, the bellhop, scowled. He was an undersized fellow, with a smooth baby face.

"Nobody got any key through me," he said. "I don't know a thing. I was just passing down the corridor, answering a call, and I heard what sounded like a shot. I reported it to the office—that is all."

"Sure," Baxter put in. "You plugged the guy and then had to go out and ditch the gun."

I kept quiet. Wylie was through phoning. He looked shaken. "Baxter," he said, "you keep Mr. Lawton under guard. The police will be here soon. I'll be down in my office."

Apparently glad to get out of a room defiled by death—a bloody one, at that—Wylie hurried out, nodding at the bellhop to go with him.

Baxter sat down on a low center table. His coat fell away and I could see the gun against his hip.

"I remember about you, Lawton," he said, looking rather happy. "You used

to be a big-shot bookie, huh?"

I studied him silently. So Baxter was a horse better! This gave me something. Baxter, naturally, would be looking for something good.

"I'm still in the game," I said. "I was out to the track this morning. Just looking 'em over. I can give you a long shot for this afternoon."

Baxter looked dubious, yet hopeful, too. After all, he was still a horse better, and a horse better could even forget to die if some tout offered him a tip at the right moment.

"No kidding?" he said.

"A promise is a promise with me."

I took a wallet out of my coat pocket and stepped toward Baxter as I opened it and thumbed through papers. I appeared—I hoped—to be about to slide a piece of paper out of the wallet. Baxter was intent on watching my fingers, and his head bent over to look.

Suddenly I dropped the wallet and shot my right fist under Baxter's jaw. Baxter gasped and swayed back. He was dazed, but still on deck. He was forcing himself up and his hand fumbled for the gun.

I crashed my left against Baxter's head. It thudded sharply, like steel weight dropping on wood. Baxter slid off the desk. He lay on the floor, moaned, and shuddered a little, as if he were in a deep sleep disturbed by a hideous nightmare.

I picked up my wallet, slipped out a piece of paper, wrote on it the name of a horse and dropped it on Baxter's chest—just a matter of keeping a promise. Then I opened the door and walked briskly back toward the freight elevators.

CHAPTER II

Planted Evidence



HOWARD STREET, who managed the details of Dave Thurman's business—mostly gambling equipment and clip joints—lived in a squat, dignified house fairly close to downtown. It wouldn't do, I thought, to approach the front door. There might be police around, not to mention Thurman's own

hired thugs.

I parked my coupe a couple of blocks away and found an alley. Joyce, I recalled, had warned me against dark alleys. Well, this one wasn't dark, not at noon, and it ran back of Howard Street's place.

I climbed over a brick wall and dropped into a garden. It was a peaceful-looking place, with rows of cabbages and carrots and onions. I crossed the garden to a rear door, opened it and walked in. A short hall led me into a kitchen. A plump woman was working at the kitchen table.

"Is Mr. Street in?" I said politely.

She looked startled. "I guess so. I don't know. People don't come in this way."

I grinned at her and walked out of the kitchen into a longer hall. I followed the hall, treading quietly, and listening. Then I stopped at a door beyond which I could hear voices.

I promptly opened the door and walked in. One man was sitting at a table. Another man was standing by the front window. They stared at me, wordless.

It was Howard Street himself who sat at the table. A space had been cleared on it and there was food—bacon and eggs and hot cakes. Street was a small man, rather chipper in appearance, with a thin, respectable, business-like face, and very sharp eyes. He stared at me for a moment, then resumed eating. He took large bites.

"You'll get diabetes, Street, eating like that," I said. "Better slow down."

Street went on eating. The man at the window wandered back into the room. He was of a fair size, slim and neat in a blue suit. His sallow face was pinched, his eyes pebblelike.

"Hello, Hawes," I said. "You haven't changed."

Hawes said nothing, glanced questioningly at Street.

"It's all right, Hawes," Street said.

He pushed the plate away and leaned back. "Ferguson!" he called out. "Come here!"

A door to another room opened and a short, chubby man plodded in. He had a plump, smooth face, washed-out blue eyes, and a thin, precise mouth. I nodded at him. I knew Ferguson. A sort of glorified secretary for Thurman and Street.

"Thought you'd better be in on this, Ferguson," Street said. He glanced up at me. "Do you mind?"

"Not at all. It's a simple matter and won't take long."

"I hear you're in trouble, Lawton," Street said. "Something about a murder."

That really made me feel like murder. One of these rats, or someone connected with them, had killed Si Meeder. It did not make me feel happy to have them jibe me about it.

"Evidently someone discovered, while I was away," I said, "that Si Meeder was a friend of mine."

"Really?"

"Yes. And someone knew that I phoned him yesterday and arranged with him to come to my room at ten o'clock this morning. Someone also knew that I had a date with Joyce Kelso at breakfast for eight o'clock. The same someone through a fake phone call, got Si to my room while I was down in the dining room." I wagged my head. "I don't like that at all."

"Too bad, of course," Street said sympathetically. "The police have a case against you?"

"Perhaps. But the motive is weak."

Street raised an eyebrow. "Weak motive?"

"Yes. Apparently nothing but the fact that Si and I were supposed to be unfriendly before I went away. As a motive, it's rather feeble."

Street shot a glance at Ferguson.

"I think Lawton has a point there," the little fat man said in a soft voice. "A good point. Yes, the case against him is not strong. Besides, most anyone could have walked into his hotel room, in his absence, and done for Si."

"Through a locked door?" Street queried sarcastically.

"That's so, too," Ferguson said musingly, and was silent.

"I'm not here to discuss a murder," I said. "No doubt Thurman told you I'd be here to see you at noon."

"Oh, yes. Something about money."

"Fifty thousand dollars!"

STREET peered up at the ceiling. Hawes quietly moved until he was standing against the wall, near the door.

"It's a lot of money, Lawton," Street said mildly.

"I'm not here to dicker," I said. "Only to tell you how I want it. Cash. Thou-

sand dollar bills will do. I'll deliver my mortgage in exchange for the money. It's a perfectly legitimate transaction."

Street smiled. "When and where?"

"I'll leave that to you."

Street peered at me keenly. The mind behind the sharp eyes was apparently busy.

"I still think it's crazy," he said. "But I'll agree to a meeting. Let's say the Blue Stallion. At nine o'clock this evening?"

"Okay. Thurman's private office?"

"Yes. You can come to the back door."

I nodded and turned toward the door. Hawes, standing nearby, stiffened.

"It's all right, Hawes," Street said.

I smiled at him and walked out. . . .

Joyce Kelso had a small office in an old building, where she functioned as a public stenographer. Having received a phone call from me, she left the office at lunchtime at one o'clock. In the lobby, she turned toward the rear and walked down a flight of steps and out into a rear yard.

She came to a narrow back street. I emerged from behind a fence and took her arm.

"There's a little cafe near here with a side entrance," I said.

We found the cafe and took a booth near the kitchen. There were yellow flowers painted on the tabletop. Joyce ordered a salad and a sandwich. I said I'd have cold chicken, potato salad, and coffee.

"What's this about a murder?" Joyce said gravely.

I told her. She gazed at me, her sensitive lips pursed.

"Why do you think Si was murdered?" she asked.

"I think he knew something that he was going to pass on to me," I said. "Something that Thurman wanted kept quiet. We may never know what it was. Then I think the murder was done the way it was so that I would be involved and my hands tied."

The waitres came in and put food on the table.

"It certainly put you in a spot," Joyce said shrewdly. "If you had stayed for the police, you'd probably have been held. But by breaking away, you have to dodge both the police and Thurman's gang. Not only that, but they could put a bullet through you and get away with it by pointing out that you're wanted for murder."

"I don't mind that." I poured three drops of cream into my coffee, just enough to change the color. "I just want to get my hands on Si's killer!"

"I understand," Joyce said gently.

My eyes brooded over her. "Did you see Si often while I was gone?"

"Fairly so. He'd just drop around for a chat every few days."

"Of course." I waved a spoon at her.

"I want you to watch your step. Obviously, Thurman and Street know all about you. They know I'm keeping in touch with you. So take no chances!"

Joyce pouted a little. "That's all you wanted to see me for? I'd hoped it might be a little personal."

"It could be," I muttered, and gazed at her with uncomfortable pleasure.

"You have a gun?"

"Oh, yes. I have that Jap automatic you sent me—the souvenir from Saipan."

"That thing?" I frowned over the thought, had an uneasy feeling about it. "You know how to use it?"

"I think I do. I fooled with it a lot when it first reached me."

"Okay. Then do this: When you leave the office this evening, call at your apartment and get the gun, but don't stay there. Go to the Winson Hotel and register as Ruth Malnic. I'll phone you early this evening."

Joyce smiled. "Okay, chief."

She left the cafe by the front door, but I slipped out by the side entrance. . . .

IT WAS getting to be a habit, I thought, entering houses by the back way. This back yard was small, bare, and swept clean. It was secluded, but within sight of neighboring houses, so I quickly opened the back door and stepped into the little hall. Then I rapped on the door.

A woman appeared from a doorway, inside. She was small, her shoulders bent. Her gray hair was neatly, plainly brushed back from her pleasantly wrinkled forehead.

Shrewd, kindly gray eyes lighted as they saw me.

"Oh, my goodness!" she exclaimed.

"Mr. Lawton! Do come in!"

She led me into the kitchen.

"I was having a pot of tea," she said.

"You're just in time."

The table was covered with a clean, freshly ironed red-checked cloth. I like red-checked tablecloths. A big

blue china teapot squatted in the middle.

"It's great to see you again, Mrs. Hanna," I said. I had to raise my voice a little, the old lady's hearing being a bit dim. "You're not married yet?"

"How you do talk, Mr. Lawton!" She bustled about and added another cup and saucer. She poured tea. "It's awful about poor Si! For ten years he had roomed with me. Such a nice man! And now he's dead!" She shuddered. "Who could have killed him?"

"We'll certainly have to find out," I said, and meant it.

"Indeed, yes. Have some cookies. And what's this silly talk I hear that you did it, Mr. Lawton?"

"Oh. You heard about that?"

"Yes. Such nonsense!" Mrs. Hanna sighed heavily. "Of course the police were here this morning. They wanted to see Si's room."

"Naturally," I said. "I'd rather like to see it myself."

Mrs. Hanna smiled. "Would you, now! Well, the room is locked, and the police instructed me not to let anyone in." She poked fingers into her apron pocket and produced a key. "Here is the key. Of course, I usually keep keys hanging on that wall."

She got up and toddled over to the wall and carefully hung the key on a nail. Then she turned to me apologetically.

"Now I must take a nap. I always do this time of the afternoon. Would you excuse me?"

I excused her with my best grin. She vanished into the hall. I could hear her uncertain footsteps fading toward the front of the house. Then I got up and removed the key from the wall.

It was a common sort of key, made for a lock that any one of thousands of skeleton keys could have unlocked easily. I took it up the stairs that ascended from the front hall. Si's room, I knew, was near the head of the stairs. I found the door, inserted the key, turned and pushed. The door opened and I stepped inside. I stepped a little too far. I was conscious of a vague shifting movement behind me. There was nothing more I could see. The thing that jolted against my head seemed to drive my spinal column back down as far as my knees.

Presently I began to see things, all manner of queer things, and they all hurt my eyes. And whatever appeared, it

was shot through with flames that seared my eyeballs. It was certainly a nightmare, and it seemed to take a pretty long time.

It was the footsteps, I thought later, that woke me up; heavy plodding footsteps coming up the stairs. I opened my eyes and I could still hear the footsteps, only they sounded different. I shook my head and it clinked like something metallic. I took hold of the door-knob and pulled myself up.

A man was now standing in the doorway. I focused my eyes and tried to smile a greeting at him. Yes, I knew this one. A police officer. A headquarters man. Homicide Squad. Yes, that was it. Sergeant Stinson.

Sergeant Stinson was smiling now. Not pleasantly.

"Now, this is real nice," he said.

"Isn't it?" I said.

I HADN'T anything against Stinson—not personally. But Stinson would want to keep me, wouldn't want to part company with me. This wasn't fair, but it couldn't be helped. I braced myself, pulled myself together. Stinson wasn't suspecting anything. My right fist flashed out. Sergeant Stinson crashed against the wall.

"Sorry, Sergeant," I said, and stepped out into the hall.

I closed the door quickly. The key was still in my hand. I locked the door. Before I was half-way down stairs, Stinson was banging on the door and complaining loudly.

Mrs. Hanna was at the foot of the stairs.

"I tried to keep him from going up there, darn him," she said petulantly. "What happened?"

I smiled at her. No use telling Mrs. Hanna that her poor hearing had permitted someone else to get in, someone who doubtless was well away by now. I gave her the key.

"You'd better unlock the door for him, darling."

"But what on earth does he want up there?"

"I think," I said, "he's going to find something—something that someone else planted in the room so that he could find it."

I bent down, kissed the old lady soundly, and sped along the hall toward the back.

CHAPTER III

The Blue Stallion

IT WAS early evening, and I was now lounging comfortably in a small room behind a bar. The bartender was an old and valued friend, and he had just brought me a late edition of the afternoon paper. I put my stein on the floor and spread the paper over the small circular table.

Well, the police were certainly making progress. It was the motive they had been working on, especially. And now they really had something tangible.

It appeared that Sergeant Stinson had discovered, in the murdered man's room, a short letter which I had written to Si Meeder several months before. The letter read:

I have been hearing things about you since I left. It seems that you are taking advantage of my absence. This is to warn you that if you don't lay off, I'll take care of you as soon as I return.

That was all, but it was enough. I remembered writing the letter—it was no forgery. I had been on Okinawa when a letter came from Si saying that he was afraid certain people had begun to suspect us of being friends. So I had written my threatening letter so that Si could carelessly let others see it, and thus bolster up the myth of our enmity.

Si certainly had let others see it. And obviously someone had stolen it, and then planted it back in Si's room for Stinson to find.

I pushed the paper aside, got up and went to the wall telephone. I called the Winsor Hotel, asked to be connected with Miss Ruth Malnic. Joyce's cool voice answered promptly.

"So nice to hear from you," Joyce said. "Are you coming up to see me?"

"No."

"Then I'm sorry I took this room."

"You won't have to stay there if you'll do just as I say," I said. "I think you'll be safe."

"I'm not anxious to be safe."

"Okay. Leave the hotel and go take a Thirtieth street car. Get off at Tenth

and Sever. I'll meet you there."

"Right away?"

"Yes. And, by the way, do you know your neighbors in your apartment house?"

"Neighbors?" repeated Joyce. "Well, my apartment is at the end of the hall. I only have one neighbor. I don't often see him. He seems to be bashful, and avoids me."

"What does he look like?"

"Short, potty fellow. Moon-faced."

I gave that a bit of thought. "Sounds like our friend, Fletcher," I guessed.

"Fletcher works for Howard Street—one of Thurman's boys."

"Would that help?"

"It would clarify an item or two. Remember, I called on you last night. And it was from your place I phoned Si. So Fletcher had a method of listening in on you, both your private conversations and those over the phone. He needn't have done it himself. Probably would have had another lad planted there."

"Couldn't we check on that?"

"Yes, but it's too late for that now. How about your gun?"

"Oh, that gun! I called at my place to get it, on my way here, but it was gone!" That about half-way confirmed my hunch.

"Gone, eh?"

"Yes. Vanished. I couldn't find it at all!"

"Well, well. Never mind. I have a gun. See you later."

The corner of Tenth and Sever was a dark, unfrequented spot. The street car stopped, the wheels clattering rebelliously. Joyce stepped off and stood a moment, her eyes searching. Then she walked toward my coupe.

I pushed open the door and she got in. I started the car and we picked up speed.

"I see by the papers that the police are very anxious to find you," Joyce said.

"I thought they would be."

"I see also that they've developed a motive. It appears that you wrote Si a threatening letter. The letter didn't say what you were sore about, though."

"I was purposely vague." I glanced at her curiously. "But the police will fill that in. They'll say I was sore at Si about you!"

JOYCE gasped a little, but she was game.

"Me?" she said. "How nice!"

"What else? Si was a noted lady's man. And he called on you while I was away. There is also the fact that, except for Si, you were the only one on the home front I wrote to."

Joyce said disgustedly: "Darn you, those letters you wrote me were anything but love letters. They sounded like you were writing to some school kid!"

"I thought I was," I said, and grinned.

Joyce sighed. "Well, I didn't feel like a school kid. By the way, I see Dad's old horse, Burley's Bride, won this afternoon."

"I was pretty sure she would," I said. "Of course I was just being sentimental in insisting that Thurman hand over the money the horse won. Any old fifty thousand would do."

I pulled the car off the road into a vacant lot, in the shadow of an old barn-like structure which appeared to be completely dark. About a hundred yards distant, across the road, and set back from it, was a queer-looking building with domes stuck here and there on the roof.

"That," I said, "is the Blue Stallion. Looks like a cross between a Moslem mosque and a couple of horse stables. Thurman's idea of something artistic in night clubs."

"I don't like this, Pete," Joyce said suddenly. "The money isn't worth it. Thurman is out to get you. It's more than just the money with him. He's afraid of you!"

I had nothing to say to that. I knew Thurman's methods, and purposes. And I knew that the next hour or two would decide whether or not I would live out the night.

"Thurman put up this place before the war," I said presently. "I've been in it, know the inside arrangements. Well, I let Howard Street select the spot for fixing up the deal because it might give me a chance to figure out what he had in mind."

"Have you figured it out?"

"Not yet."

"You're coming to my part?"

"Yes. The place won't be open for business for an hour yet. Now, Thurman or Street or that fellow Fletcher would know you if they saw you, but I doubt if they're around now. And the hired help won't know you."

Joyce smiled. "So you want me to go

in there?"

I nodded. "Just tell the doorman or whoever accosts you that you have a date to meet someone there later, but you had nowhere else to wait. Watch your chance, and as soon as you can, go up the stairs to the left of the foyer, to the mezzanine. You'll see a couple of private offices. You follow a passage around the offices that leads to a stairway. Go down the stairs and unlatch the door at the bottom."

"That's all?"

"If you get a chance, find out from the doorman if either Thurman or Street or Fletcher has been around this evening."

We got out of the car and I guided her down the road. We crossed into the large, darkened parking lot and approached the building. As we reached the side wall, I gave her a gentle shove toward the front, while I turned toward the rear.

Now alone, I stopped suddenly, puzzled, and stared down at the ground.

This, I thought, was queer. Someone had been burning papers—lots of them. The ground along the wall was littered with their charred remains.

Very queer indeed. I pondered a moment, then went on around the corner of the building. Here was the tall, narrow door to which I had been instructed to come. Beyond, at the further corner of the building, was an enclosure which made a yard just outside the kitchen door.

I approached the picket fence which encircled the enclosure. I could hear the kitchen help at work, inside. I could also see several brooms, leaning against the outside wall. I reached over and took one of the brooms. Back at the door, I waited, watchful, wary.

PRESENTLY the latch clicked inside. The door opened quietly. Joyce appeared in the doorway, slipped out.

"No trouble?" I whispered.

"Not much." Her eyes were bright with excitement. "But I almost ran into a big fellow cleaning up the offices. Mean-looking lug. But I don't think he saw me."

"Good." This was better than I had expected. "Anything else?"

"Oh, yes. I found out that Howard Street was here early this evening. He was just leaving when the help began

to arrive."

So probably Howard Street himself was responsible for that burned paper. I put my arm around Joyce's shoulders and faced her back toward the coupe. But she clung close to me, raised her face. I kissed her.

"You go on back to the car," I muttered.

"I don't want to go. Not now."

"You go on back. And take this broom with you."

Again I gave her a gentle shove, stepped inside quickly and closed the door. The dimly-lit narrow stairway was carpet-lined. I stepped quietly upwards to the corridor above.

The corridor was also carpeted. I hadn't heard the fellow coming, and met him face to face. He was as tall as I, with more weight. His face looked as if it had been pushed around—which it certainly had—leaving him embittered. I remembered him from the years gone by. A gun appeared in his hand instantly.

He was a little too far away for me to reach, so I thought I might as well be nice about it.

"Good evening, Blake," I said, and and smiled.

Blake was not impressed. "You ain't got no ticket to come in here," he said. "Back into that room!"

"Thanks," I said, and meant it, since Blake indicated a door in the passage leading to Thurman's room.

I moved in through the doorway, Blake following. It was a sizable room. The rich carpet underfoot, inches deep, was a disturbing reddish color. Pictures of horses and women lined the walls.

One of the two ornate desks had a telephone on it. Blake moved toward it. I leaned comfortably against the other desk. Watching me carefully, Blake pushed out his grimy left hand for the telephone.

My hand whipped an arc. The heavy paperweight I had seized struck Blake in the face and he crashed back across the desk. The telephone spilled on the floor. I had to do two things in a hurry—replace the telephone and kick the gun across the floor, out of the way.

Blake recovered his balance, was on his feet. Words of rage bubbled out of a mouth that was spurring blood. A huge fist came at me and skidded along my jaw as I dodged. My stiff right upper-

cut rattled Blake's teeth.

I took a powerful blow under the heart but managed to back away lightly, and shuddered my breathing back to normal. Blake was following. Blake, an ex-pug, was good. But he was mad, reckless murder in his eyes. I measured him, dodged his flailing arms, got set, and drove a sharp right into the side of his head.

Blake was stunned on his feet. I waited for him to drop. He did drop. And didn't move.

I stepped rapidly out to the tool closet, found rope and rags, returned and went to work. Blake's eyes were opening, and he groaned as I lugged him out to the closet. I found keys in his pocket, locked him in the closet, returned to Thurman's office and carefully adjusted the furniture.

Calmly then, but tensely, I surveyed Thurman's office. I touched little—just wandered about, examining the setup, looking for something. Just what, I didn't quite know. Just some indication of Thurman's plans. Time passed rapidly. In half an hour or so I glanced at my watch. I'd about used up my time. I had found little, but Thurman would be along soon. I would have to take a chance, I decided, on whatever ability I had to scheme and fight my own way when the time came.

Suddenly voices came to me from down toward the foyer. I stepped out into the corridor, quietly closed the door, walked back to the head of the rear stairs, trod slowly down. I was still dissatisfied.

I was on the bottom step when my eye caught a smattering of something on the carpet at the bottom, close to the wall that faced me. I squatted down and examined it. Partly powdery, partly flaky. Plaster, of course.

Eagerly, I traced my finger up the wall in a direct line with the little pile on the floor. But there was no time. The voices were now in the corridor above, might be coming all the way back. I stepped quickly out into the night, gently closed the door behind me.

It was an effort to tear myself away, for I felt certain that the plaster might mean something. It was not an apparent thought, but one that lay in my subconscious.

I hesitated, listening, wanting to go back.

CHAPTER IV

A Long Shot Wins



JOYCE was waiting impatiently in the coupe. I slipped in beside her. We sat silent. Joyce reached out a hand and put it over mine. It felt warm and alive. The parking lot over by the night club was busier now. A couple of extra lights added filmy luster to the entrance.

"I still wish you'd pass it up, Pete," Joyce said, in a low voice. "The way I see it, Thurman is scared to death of you. He won't take a chance on your getting away alive. The money isn't worth the cost—to me."

"You're forgetting something," I said.

"Forgetting what?"

"What about Si?"

"Si?"

"Yes." I was conscious of a cold rage that gripped my heart. "Someone killed Si. In cold blood. I want the money, but I also want the fellow who killed Si!"

"Of course," murmured Joyce. "You think you can get him?"

"I don't know. I hope so."

"Do you know who killed him?"

"Oh, I'm practically certain of that."

I didn't say so, but I was thinking that probably the one who killed Si was the one also delegated to kill me! Joyce increased the pressure on my hand. She knew argument was useless.

"Somehow I wish the police were here," she said plaintively.

I chuckled. "They will be. Trust Thurman for that." I turned my wrist, noted the time by the light from the dashboard. "We'd better get started. Bring your broom."

"Oh, that broom! What in the world do I want with that?"

"You'll find out."

We got out, walked quickly across the road, threaded a way through parked cars, made straight for the side of the building. I indicated the charred papers.

"Just sweep 'em up into a pile back out of the way."

"Then what?" queried Joyce.

I pointed upwards. "That's the win-

dow of Thurman's office. Stand here and watch the window. You really should have someone with you, but it's too late for that."

Joyce's face was pale as she watched me swing toward the back of the building. I reached the tall narrow door at the rear, rapped on it. The door opened at once. The man standing just inside was the gunman, Hawes, a dull glow in his somber eyes.

"Go right on up, Lawton," Hawes merely said.

I nodded, and walked up the stairs. The corridor door to Thurman's office was open. Thurman stood in the middle of the room. Street sat quietly at a desk.

Thurman's massive body swung toward me. His face was flushed, but he was cocky now, rather than fearful. He grinned broadly.

"I guess we're ready for you, Lawton," he said. "Eh, Howard?"

Howard Street glanced up and said casually: "I think so. That is, if Lawton has that mortgage."

I fixed my eyes on Thurman. "You have the money?"

"Sure," Thurman said. "Since seeing you this morning, I thought it over. I don't think you have much of a case, but I got to thinking about Joyce Kelso. It never struck me before that she was left penniless. You'll see that she gets the money?"

"Certainly," I said. This was going too rapidly, too easily. "You produce the cash and I'll fork over the mortgage."

Thurman turned to Street again. "Okay, Howard."

Street pulled out a desk drawer. He tossed a stack of currency on the table. I picked it up. Backing away a little, I carefully counted it—fifty thousand-dollar bills, held together by a rubber band.

Yes, this was certainly much too easy.

I shoved the money in my pocket and took out an envelope. I handed it to Thurman. Curiously Thurman extracted the document it contained and glanced through it. Then, as if it were nothing much, he tossed it to Street. And Street, after peering at it more carefully, leaned over, as if bored, and placed the mortgage on a large silver tray.

Too simple, I thought again. And much too easy.

"I guess that's all," Thurman said. "Better go out the way you came in.

You might be seen going out the front way." He grinned. "I understand the cops are looking for you."

"Certainly," I said.

BUT I didn't know about that. I figured the gunman, Hawes, would be down by that back door. He wasn't, though. Turning toward the corridor, I saw Hawes saunter past in the other direction.

I walked out to the corridor, swung back toward the rear stairs. I went quite slowly until I reached the top of the stairs. There was no one in sight. It was quiet. I started down.

The air about my legs was quite cold. So the back door was open!

I trod steadily downward. My hand was in my coat pocket. I was within a few steps of the bottom when a form edged through the door. Fletcher! The plump little man stood just inside the door, facing me. There was a faint flush on his fat face.

In his hand was an automatic. Fletcher wasn't going to wait. I knew that. Fletcher was going to fire on the instant. That was the scheme—to kill me without warning.

So I didn't wait. I fired the gun in my pocket.

Fletcher's eyes looked surprised. The gun dropped from his fingers. He tried to raise his hand to look at it, but couldn't. The hand flopped against his side. The smashed wrist oozed blood rapidly. The little man tried to pull himself up. He couldn't. His knees buckled. He slid down the wall and sat on the floor. Pounding feet sounded above.

I turned about. At the head of the stairs appeared Thurman, and Street, and Hawes. All three of them. It was the gunman, Hawes, who came first. They all peered down at me. They, too, were surprised—surprised to find me on my feet.

Thurman muttered something hoarsely at Hawes, and Hawes' hand darted under his coat. So I fired again and Hawes was the one to look surprised. It was queer about that, I thought. Shoot a man and he always looks surprised.

Hawes was flopping at Thurman's feet, and he tumbled two steps down the stairway.

I held my gun comfortably in the palm of my hand.

"Just hold everything, boys," I said

to Thurman and Street.

The two were motionless. They seemed to be expecting someone from along the corridor. I expected someone, too, and was a little puzzled that no one came. After all, there should be a police officer around somewhere.

I shot a quick glance behind me at Fletcher. The little man had passed out. I didn't blame him.

"You see, I expected him, boys," I said, smiling up at Thurman and Street. "So don't blame him. I was here a while ago. I saw plaster powder on the floor down here. Someone had fired a bullet into the wall. It's about five feet up from the wall, I believe."

Still, the two were silent, watching intently. I wished that someone would come. No telling what trick those two might pull on me.

I went on talking. "You know what happened. You had Fletcher steal Joyce Kelso's gun, my souvenir from Saipan. He shot Si Meeder with it. I was to be stuck with that killing. You figured he'd get me as I came down these stairs. Right away he'd plant that Jap gun on me. The bullet in the wall came out of that gun, too, so he could say I fired at him and missed."

The two above me had been standing very still. Howard Street was a little behind Thurman. Thurman's face looked puffy.

And I went on: "I know what you did with that—"

The movement came from Street. I had figured it would. Thurman always let the other fellow do the dirty work. I fired just as Street did. But Street had stopped to push Thurman a little, and his aim wasn't good. It was Thurman who stopped my bullet. He got it in his ample middle.

Thurman rolled over and crashed against the side of the stairway and lay there.

I figured I'd have to fire again, at Street. But I didn't. There was a movement behind me, below.

"What the devil goes on here?" a deep indignant voice growled.

IT WAS Sergeant Stinson. Joyce was with him. Street saw what the odds were. He sat down on the top step and just waited. I told Stinson what had happened.

"When I saw that burnt paper out-

side," I added, "I figured what they planned to do. When I gave them the mortgage Thurman had just bought from me, they put it on a silver tray. I didn't see it, but my guess is that they set fire to it right away. That would be to support their claim that I robbed them of fifty thousand bucks.

"But they'd have to do something with the charred remains, and in a hurry. Why not just drop 'em out of the window? Fine. But Street is a careful guy. He prepared for possible questions by making a litter of burned papers outside, just about the spot where the remains of the mortgage would drop!"

Stinson merely grunted.

"It happened that way," Joyce said. "You said something to me about it being better if I just had someone with me. So I dashed around the front and who should I see but the Sergeant here! He was with me under the window!"

"I suggest, Sergeant," I said, "that you first take a look in Fletcher's pockets."

Stinson squatted by the fallen figure and felt around it. His hand came out with something wrapped in a handkerchief. He flipped the handkerchief open and peered at a gun.

You could tell by the rounded hammerless top of the thing, something like a German Mauser, that it was a Jap automatic.

"That belongs to Joyce," I said. "Fletcher swiped it from her. He didn't get a chance to plant it on me. His own handkerchief is wrapped around it to keep his prints off. I guess that's all..."

It was eight o'clock in the morning. The next morning. The bright morning sun made a dazzling display of the silverware on the table in the hotel dining room. I was eating thin-sliced toast, cut in strips. Joyce was sipping coffee, and looking at me.

A burly man lumbered across the dining room toward us. I looked up.

"Good morning, Baxter," I said.

The house detective grinned and rubbed his jaw.

"Thanks, anyway, for the tip," he said.

"What tip?" I said.

"You gave me the name of a horse. Remember? You dropped it on my chest when I was—well, snoozing. I played him. Put ten bucks on his nose. He came in and paid thirty to one." He shuffled his feet and said anxiously: "You don't happen to have one for this afternoon, huh?"

"Later, maybe."

"Well, thanks," said Baxter, and ambled away.

I looked at Joyce. "Well, you have fifty thousand bucks," I said. "Any idea what you're going to do with it?"

"Not the slightest," Joyce said, and smiled faintly. "I'm more interested in what you're going to do with yourself—and me!"

I dodged that. "You know, I knew by noon yesterday that it was Fletcher who killed Si."

"How did you know?"

"It was while I was at Street's place. Fletcher said something about anybody could have got into my room and shot Si. And Street said no, not through a locked door. Of course, I'd deliberately let the hotel people believe the door was locked."

"Oh, wasn't it?"

"No. I'd left it unlocked. Naturally, the reason Fletcher knew that was because he was there."

Joyce smiled gravely again. "Don't change the subject. What are you going to do about me?"

I was worried about that, too.

"I'm a long shot, darling," I said. "A very long shot."

Joyce laughed.

"Baxter took a chance on one, and came out a winner."

"Then you've bought yourself a ticket," I said solemnly. "And you'd better pray for a dry track."



COMING NEXT ISSUE

DEATH WATCH

An Exciting Complete Mystery Novel

By ARTHUR LEO ZAGAT

THEY DO IT WITH MIRRORS

By SIMON YORK

When Ed Hall finds the body under a nightclub spotlight, it's clearly murder—yet it's clear that nobody could have done it!



CLIMBED on a stool at the end of the bar in Jack Joy's joint and spoke to Jack himself, who was busy setting up two old-fashioned.

"Make it three," I said. "No, make it four and have one with me. What's the pitch, Jack? I hear you set up a peep show for the

suckers."

"Hi, Ed. Nope, it's not a peep show—it's Art."

"What's the difference?"

"If they hold still, it's Art. If they wiggle around, it's illegal. That's the rule. Here."

He handed me a program. It read:

THE JOY CLUB presents *The Magic Mirror*

Beautiful Models in a Series of Entertaining and Artistic Pageants

10 p.m.—"Aphrodite"	Estelle
11 p.m.—"Sacrifice to the Sun".....	Estelle and Hazel
12 p.m.—"The High Priestess".....	Hazel
1 a.m.—"The Altar Victim".....	Estelle
2 a.m.—"Invocation to Pan".....	Estelle and Hazel

I heard two sharp *beeps!*—a high tension buzzer sound, like radio code—from a spot back of the bar.

"That's the signal for the eleven o'clock show," Jack explained, turning away. He busied himself underneath the bar.

Being at the end of the bar I could see behind it somewhat. He had enough electrical gear back there to make a happy Christmas for a boy scout—switches, a rheostat dingus, a turntable for recordings, and a hand microphone.

I leaned over and sized it up. I have a weakness for gadgets, from my old man. He named me Thomas Edison Hill in hopes that I would emulate his idol. I disappointed him—I didn't invent the

atom bomb, but I do sometimes try to repair my own typewriter.

JACK flipped a switch and picked up the hand mike. His voice came out of the juke box:

"We now present The Magic Mirror."

Then the turntable picked up with *Hymn to the Sun* from *Coq d'Or*, and he started turning the rheostat slowly. The lights went down in the joint and came up slowly in the Magic Mirror.

The "Mirror" was actually a sheet of glass about ten feet wide and eight high which shut off a little balcony stage. When the house lights were on bright and the stage was dark, you could not see through the glass at all. It looked like a mirror. As the house lights went out and the stage lights came on, you could see through the glass and a picture slowly built up in the "Mirror."

Jack had a single bright light under the bar which lighted him and the controls and which did not go out with the house lights. Because of my position at the end of the bar this bright light hit me square in the eye.

I had to block it with my hand to see the stage.

It was something to see.

Two girls, a blonde and a brunette. A sort of altar or table, with the blonde sprawled across it, voluptuously. The brunette standing at the end of the altar, grabbing the blonde by the hair with one hand while holding a fancy dagger unraised with the other. There was a backdrop in gold and dark blue—a sunburst in a phony Aztec or Egyptian design, but nobody was looking at that. They were looking at the girls.

The brunette was wearing a high, show-girl head dress, silver sandals, and a G-string girdle affair in glass jewels. The blonde had her down-stage knee drawn up just enough to get past sufficiently broad-minded censors. But I was not looking at the blonde. I was looking



The three cops had him helpless

at the brunette. She was so beautiful it hurt.

"Great jumping jeepers!" I heard somebody say, and was about to shush whoever it was when I realized that it was me.

Then the lights went down and I remembered to breathe.

I paid the clip price for my drink with-out a quiver and told Jack I wanted to meet the girls.

"You'll meet them all right," he assured me. "They are hostesses between shows."

When they showed up at the stairway leading down from the balcony he signaled them to come over and then introduced me.

"Hazel Dorn, Estelle d'Arcy—meet Eddie Hill."

"How do you do?" Hazel, the brunette, said.

"Oh, I've met the Ghost before," the blonde put in. "How's business? Rattled any chains lately?"

"Business is good enough," I said, and let it pass.

I knew her all right—but as Audrey Johnson, not as Estelle d'Arcy. She had been a steno at the City Hall when I was doing an autobiography of the Chief of Police. I had not liked her much. She was sweet enough, I guess, and pretty, but she had an instinct for finding a sore point and picking at it.

I am not ashamed of being a ghost writer, nor is it a secret. You will find my name on the title page of *Forty Years a Cop*, as well as the name of the Chief. "With Edison Hall" is in small print, but it is there.

"How did you like the show?" Hazel asked, when I had ordered a round.

"I liked you," I said, softly enough to keep it private. "I can't wait for the next show to see more of you."

Estelle leaned across the bar to Jack.

"Jackie Boy," she said in sweetly reasonable tones, "you held the lights too long again. It doesn't matter to me in that pose, but you had poor old Hazel so tired before you doused the lights, she was trembling like a leaf."

Jack placed a three-minute egg-timer on the bar. "Three minutes it says—three minutes you did."

"I don't think it was more than three minutes," Hazel objected. "I wasn't so tired."

"You were trembling, dear. I saw you.

You mustn't tire yourself—it puts lines in your face. Anyhow," she added, "I'll just keep this." And she put the egg-timer in her purse. "We'll time the act ourselves hereafter."

"It was three minutes," Jack insisted.

"Never mind," she answered good-humoredly. "From now on it'll be three minutes, or mamma will have to lock Jackie in the dark closet."

Jack started to answer, then thought better of it and walked off to the opposite end of the bar. Estelle shrugged, threw down the rest of her drink and walked away too. I saw her speak to Jack again, then join some customers at one of the tables. Hazel watched her for a while.

"I could paddle that chippie," she muttered.

"You ought not to be in a dive like this," I said. "You ought to have a movie contract."

SHE laughed without mirth. "Eddie, did you ever try to get a movie contract? I've tried."

"Just the same—oh, well! But why are you sore at Estelle?"

"She—Skip it. She probably means well."

"You mean she shouldn't have dragged you into her complaint?"

"Partly."

"What else?"

"Oh, nothing—look, do you think I need any wrinkle remover?"

I examined her quite closely, until she actually blushed a little, then assured her that she did not.

"Thanks," she said. "Estelle evidently thinks I do. She's been advising me to take care of myself lately and has been bringing me little presents of beauty preparations. I thank her for them, and it appears to be sheer friendliness on her part, but it makes me squirm."

I nodded and changed the subject. I did not want to talk about Estelle. I wanted to talk about Hazel—and me. I mentioned an agent I knew (my own) who could help her, and got her really interested, if not in me, at least in what I was saying.

Presently she glanced at the clock back of the bar and squealed.

"I've got to peel for the customers," she said. "Bye now!"

It was five minutes to twelve. I shifted from the end of the bar to its side, just

opposite Jack's Magic Mirror controls. I did not want that bright light of his interfering with my seeing Hazel.

It was just about twelve straight up when Jack came from the rear of the joint, elbowed his other barman out of the way, and took his place near the controls.

"Has she rung the buzzer yet?" he asked me.

"Not a buzz," I said. "None that I heard."

"Okay, then."

He cleared dirty glasses off the top of the bar while he waited for the starting signal, changed the platter on the turntable, and generally messed around. I kept my eyes on the Mirror.

I heard the two *beeps!* Sharp and clear then. But Jack did not announce the show at once. I glanced around and saw that, though he had the mike in his hand, he was staring past it at the door, and looking considerably upset.

There were two cops just inside the door, Hannegan and Feinstein. I suppose Jack was afraid of a raid, but I knew what they were there for, even before one of them gave Jack a broad grin and waved him the okay sign. They had just slipped in for a free gander at the show under the excuse of watching the public morals.

"We now present the Magic Mirror," said Jack's voice out of the juke box.

Somebody climbed on the stool beside me and slipped a hand under my arm. I looked around. It was the brunette, Hazel.

"You're not here. You're up there," I said foolishly.

"No," Hazel shook her head. "There's been a switch. I'll tell you after the show."

The lights were coming up in the Mirror and the juke box was cranking out *Valse Triste*. The altar was in this scene, too, and Estelle was sprawled over it much as she had been before. As the scene got lighter you could see a red stain down her side and the prop dagger. Hazel had told me what each of the acts were. This was the one called "The Altar Victim," scheduled for the one o'clock show.

I was disappointed at not seeing Hazel, but I had to admit it was good—good theater, of the nasty sort, sadism and a beautiful girl combined. The red stuff—catsup I guessed—trickling down her

bare side and the handle of the prop dagger sticking up as if she had been stabbed through—the customers liked it. It was a natural follow-up to the "Sacrifice to the Sun."

Hazel screamed in my ear.

Her first scream was solo. The next thing I can recall it seemed as if every woman in the place was screaming—soprano, alto, and some tenor. Through it came the bull voice of Hannegan, the cop.

"Keep your seats, folks! Somebody turn on the lights!"

I grabbed Hazel by the shoulders and shook her. "What's the matter? What's up?"

She looked dazed, "She's dead—she's dead—she's dead!" she chanted, pointing at the Mirror.

She scrambled down from the stool and took out for the back of the house. I started after her. The house lights came on abruptly.

WE FINISHED one, two, three, up the stairway, through a little dressing room, and on to the stage. I almost caught up with Hazel, and Officer Feinstein was close on my heels.

We stood there, jammed in the door, blinking at the stage floodlights, and not liking what we saw under them. Estelle was dead all right. The dagger, which should have been faked between her arm and her side with catsup spilled around to maintain the illusion, was three inches closer to her breastbone than it should have been.

The slender, steel blade had been stabbed straight into her heart.

On the floor, on the side of the altar away from the audience was the egg-timer. As I looked at it the last of the sand ran out.

I caught Hazel as she fell—she was a big armful—and placed her on the dressing room couch.

"Eddie," Officer Feinstein said to me, "tell Hannegan not to let anyone out. And will you call the station for me? I'm staying here."

I called the station, but I did not have to tell Hannegan anything. The big cop had the patrons all seated again and was jollying them along. Jack Joy was still standing back of the bar, a shocked expression on his face, the bright light at the control board making him look like a death's head.

At twelve-fifteen, Lieutenant Spade Jones of Homicide showed up, and from there on things slipped into a smooth routine. Spade knew me well, having helped me work up some of the book I did for the Chief, and he grabbed onto me at once for some of the background of the case.

By twelve-thirty he was reasonably sure that none of the customers could have done it.

"I won't say one of them *didn't* do it, Eddie, my boy—anybody could have done it who knew the exact second to slip upstairs, grab the knife, and slide it into her ribs. But the chances are against any of them knowing just when and how to do it."

"Somebody from the outside could have slipped in and done it. There's a fire exit at the foot of the stairs."

"You think I haven't noticed that?"

He turned away and gave Hannegan instructions to let anybody go who could produce satisfactory identification with a local address. The others, as material witnesses, would have to go downtown to have closer ties put on them by the night court.

Perhaps some would land in the tank for further investigation.

The photographers were busy upstairs on the stage and so were the fingerprint boys. The assistant medical examiner showed up, followed by reporters. A few minutes later, after the house was cleared, Hazel came downstairs and joined me. Neither of us said anything, but I patted her on the back. When they carried down the basket stretcher a little later, with a blanket-wrapped shape in it, I put my arms around her while she buried her eyes on my shoulders.

Lieutenant Spade Jones talked to us one at a time.

Jack Joy was not talking.

"It ain't smart to talk without a lawyer," was all Spade could get out of him.

I thought to myself that it would be better to talk to Spade now than to be sweated and maybe massaged a little under the lights. I figured my testimony would clear Jack even though it would show that there was a spat between him and Estelle.

Spade would not frame a man. He was an honest cop.

Spade took my story, then he took Hazel's, and called me back.

"Eddie, my boy," he said, "help me dig

into this thing. As I understand it, this girl, Hazel, should have been on in the twelve o'clock show."

"That's right."

HE STUDIED one of the Joy Club's programs. "Hazel says she went upstairs to undress for the show about eleven-fifty-five."

"It was exactly that time."

"Yeah. She was with you, wasn't she? She says she went up and that Estelle followed her in and gave her a song-and-dance that the boss said to swap the two shows around."

"I wouldn't know about that."

"Naturally not. She says she beefed a little about the switch in shows but gave in and came on downstairs, where she joined you. Correct?"

"Correct."

"Mmmm. By the way, your remark about the fire door might lead to something. Hazel tells me that Estelle had a boy friend, a trumpeter in that joint across the street. He could have ducked over here and stabbed her. Wouldn't take long."

"How would he know when to do it? It was supposed to be Hazel's show."

"Yes, but swapping shows sounds like Estelle had made a date, and that sounds like a man. In which case, he'd know about the time element. One of the boys is looking into it. Now about these shows—do you suppose you could show me how they were staged? Hannegan tried fooling with the switchboard, but all he got was a shock."

"I'll try it," I said, getting up. "It's nothing very fancy. Did you ask Jack about Hazel's statement that Estelle had permission from him to swap the shows?"

"That's the one thing he cracked on. He states flatly that he didn't know that the shows were swapped. He says he expected to see Hazel in the Mirror."

The switchboard controls looked complicated, but weren't. I showed Spade Jones the rheostat and told him it enabled Jack Joy to turn either set of lights down slowly while the other set went up. I found a bypass switch back of the rheostat which accounted for the present condition—all lights burning brightly, house and stage. There was a black-out switch and there was a switch which cut the hand microphone and the turntable in through the juke box.

Near the latter switch was the buzzer—a small black case with two binding posts—which the girls used to signal Jack that they were ready to go on. Centered on the under side of the bar was a hundred-and-fifty-watt bulb hooked in on its own line, separate from the rheostat. Except for the line to this light, all the wires disappeared into a steel conduit under the bar. It was this light which had dazzled me during the eleven o'clock show. It seemed excessive. A peanut bulb would have been more appropriate. Apparently Jack liked lots of light.

I explained the controls to Spade, demonstrating them as I gave a running account of what had happened. First, I switched the rheostat back to "House" and threw off the by-pass switch, leaving the room brightly lighted and the Magic Mirror dark.

"The time is five minutes of twelve," I said. "Hazel leaves me to go upstairs. I shift around to the bar stool just opposite where I am now standing. At midnight Jack comes up and asks me if I've heard the buzzer. I say 'no.' He fiddles around a bit, clearing away glasses and the like. Then come two beeps on the buzzer. He picks up the microphone, but he doesn't announce the show for a few seconds—he's just noticed Hannegan and Feinstein come in. One of them gives him the high sign and he goes ahead."

I picked up the mike myself and spoke into it: "We now present The Magic Mirror!"

I put down the mike and flipped on the turntable switch. The same platter was on, and the juke box started playing *Valse Triste*.

Hazel looked up at me sharply from where she had been resting her head on her arms a few tables away. She looked horrified as if the reconstruction were too much for her stomach.

I turned the rheostat slowly from "House" to "Stage." The room darkened and the stage lit up.

"That's all there was to it," I said. "Hazel sat down beside me just as Jack announced the show. As the lights came on, she screamed. The rest is history."

SPADE scratched his chin. "You say Jack Joy was standing in front of you when the buzzer signal came from upstairs?"

"Positive."

"You gave him a motive—the war he was having with Estelle. But you've given him an alibi too."

"That's right. Either Estelle punched that buzzer herself, then lay down and stabbed herself, or she was murdered and the murderer punched the buzzer to cover up, then ducked out while everybody had their eyes on the Mirror. Either way I had Jack Joy in sight."

"It's an alibi all right," the officer conceded. "Unless you were in cahoots with him."

"Prove it," I grinned. "Not with him. I think he's a heel."

"We're all heels, more or less, Eddie, my boy. Let's look around upstairs."

I switched the by-pass on, leaving both stage and house lighted, and followed him. On the stage I pointed out the buzzer push-button to him, after I had found it myself. A conduit came up through the floor and ended in a junction box on the wall, from which cords ran to the flood lights. The button was on the junction box. I wondered why it was not on the "altar", then saw that the altar was a movable prop. Apparently, the girls punched the button, then fell quickly into their poses.

Spade tried the button meditatively, then wiped print powder off on his trousers.

"I can't hear it," he said.

"Naturally not. This stage is almost a soundproof booth."

He saw the egg-timer then and I told him about seeing the last of the sand run out. He pursed his lips.

"You're sure?"

"Call it halucination. But I think I saw it. I'll testify to it."

He sat down on the altar, avoiding the bloodstain, and said nothing for quite a long time.

"Eddie, my boy," he said finally, "you've not only given Jack Joy an alibi, you've practically made it impossible for anyone to have done it."

"Could it have been suicide?"

From the mechanics angle, perhaps, but not from the psychological angle. Would she have started that egg-timer for her own suicide? Another thing. Took a look at the altar. Taste it."

"Huh?"

"Don't thro

I did, ver
again. Th

ll it, then."

melled
ers.

Blood and tomato catsup. I thought I could detect differences in appearance as well.

"You see, son?" Lieutenant Spade Jones continued. "If she was going to have blood on her chest she wouldn't have bothered with catsup. Aside from that and the timer, it's a perfect, dramatic, female-style suicide. But it won't wash. It's murder, Eddie."

Feinstein stuck his head in. "Lieutenant—"

"What is it?"

"That musician punk. He had a date with her all right. But he's clear. The band was on the air at midnight, in a number that features him in a trumpet solo."

"Oh, is that so?"

Spade sat a while after Feinstein had left.

"When it's light in here," he said then, "it's dark out in the audience. When it's light out in the audience, it's dark in here."

"That's right. Ordinarily, that is. Right now we've got both sides lighted with the by-pass."

"Ordinarily, is what I mean. Light, dark. Dark, light. Eddie, my boy—"

"Yes?"

"Are you sweet on that Hazel girl?"

"I'm leaning that way," I admitted.

"Then keep an eye on her. The murderer was in here for just a few seconds—the egg-timer and the buzzer prove that. He wasn't any of the few people who knew about the swap in the shows—not since the trumpet-playing boy friend got knocked out of the running. And it was dark. He murdered the wrong party, Eddie, my boy. There's another murder coming up."

"Hazel," I said slowly.

"Yes, Hazel."

ME, HAZEL, the two waiters, the other barman, and Jack Joy were all shooed home by Lieutenant Spade Jones. I think Spade was tempted to hold Jack simply because the night club operator wouldn't talk, but he compromised by telling him that if he stuck his head outside his hotel, he would find a nice policeman ready to take him down to a nice cell.

and put a finger tipped me a wink
lips as he said
good night

B

Hazel let me

When I

saw that she lived alone in a single apartment in a building without a doorman, I decided she needed someone to stand guard over her.

She stepped into the kitchenette and mixed me a drink.

"One drink and out you go, Ed," she called to me. "You've been very sweet and I want to see you again and thank you, but tonight this girl goes to bed. I'm whipped."

"I'm staying all night," I announced firmly.

She came out with a drink in her hand and looked at me, both annoyed and puzzled a little.

"Calm yourself, beautiful," I told her. "I'm going to watch over you. Somebody is trying to kill you."

She dropped the drink. I helped her clean it up and explained the situation.

"Somebody stabbed a girl in a dark room," I finished. "That somebody thought it was you. He knows better by now, and he will be looking for a chance to finish the job. What you and I have got to figure out is: *Who wants to kill you?*"

She sat down and started to manhandle a hankerchief. "Nobody wants to kill me, Eddie. It was Estelle they were after."

"No, it wasn't."

"But it couldn't be me. I know."

"What do you know?"

"I—Oh, it's impossible. Stay all night if you want to. You can sleep on the couch."

She got up and pulled the bed down out of the wall, went in the bath, closed the door, splashed around for a while, then came out.

I started unlacing my shoes. She stepped over and switched off the light, then went over to the one big window and raised the shade. The sash was closed but, with the light out, you could see outside easily.

"Stand back from that window," I said.

"You're too good a target."

"Huh? Oh, very well."

She backed up a few steps but continued to stare thoughtfully out the window. I stared thoughtfully at her. There was a big neon sign across the street and the colored lights, pouring in the window, covered her from head to foot with a rosy liquid glow. She looked like something out of fairyland.

Presently I wasn't thinking how she

looked. I was thinking about another room, where a girl had lain murdered, with the light of a night club shining through a pane of glass, the way this neon was. My thoughts rearranged themselves rapidly and very painfully. I added them up a second time and still got the same answer. I did not like the answer.

"Hazel," I said softly.

She turned to me. "Yes, Eddie?"

"I just had a new idea. Why should anyone want to kill you?"

"You said that before. There isn't any reason."

"I know. You're right. There isn't any. But put it this way. *Why should you want to kill Estelle?*"

I thought she was going to faint again, but I didn't care. I wanted to shock her. Her lusciousness meant nothing to me now but a trap that confused my thoughts.

I HAD not wanted to think Hazel guilty, so I had disregarded the fact that of all the persons involved she was the only one with the necessary opportunity, the knowledge of the swapped shows, and at least some motive. She had made it plain that she detested Estelle. She had covered it up, but it was still evident.

But most important of all, the little stage had not been dark! True, it *looked* dark—from the outside. You can't see through glass when all the light comes from the side you're on—but light passes through the glass and illumines beyond it just the same. Even as now the neon on the street illuminated this room we were in fairly brightly so the brilliant lights of Jack's bar illuminated the little stage even when the stage flood lights were out.

Hazel knew that. She knew it because she had been in there many times, getting ready to pose for the suckers. Therefore she knew that it was not a case of mistaken identity in the dark. There was no dark. And it would have to be nearly pitch black for anyone to have mistaken Hazel's blue-black mane for Estelle's peroxidized mop.

Hazel knew—so why hadn't she said so? Why hadn't she told me my wrong-girl-in-the-dark theory was cockeyed?

"Eddie, have you gone crazy?" Her voice was frightened.

"No—gone sane. I'll tell you how you

did it, my beautiful darling. Estelle got in her pose, and asked you to punch the buzzer. You did—but first you grabbed the knife and slid it in her ribs. You wiped the handle, looked around, punched the buzzer, and lammed. About ten seconds later you were slipping your arm in mine. Me—your alibi!"

"It *had* to be you," I went on, "for no one else would have had the gall to commit murder with nothing but glass between him and an audience. The stage was lighted—from the outside. You knew that, but it didn't worry you. You were used to parading around in front of that glass before your act, certain you could not be seen while the house lights were on. No one else would have dared!"

She looked at me as if she could not believe her ears, and her chin began to quiver. Then she squatted down on the floor and burst into tears. Real, dripping tears. It was my cue to go soft, but I didn't. I stood over her.

"Why did you kill her?" I asked. "Why did you kill her?"

"Get out of here."

"Not likely. I'm going to see you fry, my beautiful angel."

I headed for the telephone, keeping my eyes on her. I did not dare turn my back. She made a break then—for the door.

I tripped her and fell on her. She was a big armful and ready to bite and claw, but I got a hammerlock on one arm and twisted.

"Be good," I warned her, "or I'll break it."

She lay still, and I began to be aware that she was not only an armful but a very female armful.

"Let me go, Eddie," she said in a tense whisper, "or I'll scream and get the cops in."

"Go right ahead, gorgeous," I told her. "The cops are just what I want, and quick."

"Eddie, Eddie, listen to reason. I didn't kill her—but I know who did."

"Huh? Who?"

"I know—I do know—but he *couldn't* have. That's why I haven't said anything."

"Tell me." She didn't answer at once. I twisted her arm. "Tell me!"

"Oh! It was Jack."

"Jack? You're crazy. I was watching him."

"But he did it, just the same. I don't know how—but he did it."

I held her down, thinking. She watched my face. "Ed?"

"Huh?"

"If I punched the buzzer, wouldn't my fingerprint be on it?"

"Should be."

"Why don't you find out?"

I thought about it for a minute. "Get up," I said then. "On your knees and then on your feet. But don't try to get your arm free and don't try any tricks, or, so help me, I'll kick you in the teeth."

SHE was docile enough, and I moved her over to the phone, dialed it with one hand and managed to get to Spade Jones through the police exchange.

"Spade? This is Eddie—Eddie Hill. Was there a fingerprint on the buzzer button?"

"I wondered when you would be getting around to thinking of that. There was."

"Whose?"

"The corpse's."

"Estelle's?"

"The same. And Estelle's print was on the egg-timer too. There were no prints on the knife. It was wiped clean. Lots of prints from both girls were around the room, and there were a few odd prints—old, probably."

I hung up the phone after getting the report and turned to Hazel. I guess I had let go her arm when Spade told me the print was not hers. She was standing there, rubbing her arm and looking at me in a very odd way.

"Well," I said, "you can twist my arm, or kick me anywhere you like. I was wrong. I'm sorry."

She started to speak, and then started to leak tears again. It finished up with her accepting my apology in the nicest way possible, smearing me with lipstick and tears. Presently I wiped her face with my handkerchief.

"You sit on the bed and I'll sit on the couch," I said. "We've got to dope this out and I can think better with that lovely chassis of yours out of reach."

She trotted obediently, and I sat down.

"You say Jack killed her," I began, "but you admit you don't know how he could have done it. Then why do you think he did?"

"The music."

"Huh?"

"The music he played for the show was *Valse Triste*. That's Estelle's music, for

Estelle's act. My act, the regular twelve o'clock act, calls for *Bohéro*. He must have known that Estelle was up there. He used the right music."

"Then you figure he must have been lying when he claimed Estelle never arranged with him to swap the shows. Still, he might have got that record by accident."

"Could, but not likely. The records were kept in order and the same ones were used every night. Anyway, I knew it had to be him before I noticed the music. Only it couldn't be."

"Only it couldn't be?"

"He hated her. She teased him."

"Suppose she did. She teased lots of people. She teased you. She teased me. So what?"

"It's not the same thing," she insisted.

"Jack was afraid of the dark."

It was a nasty story. The lunk was afraid of total darkness, really afraid, the way some kids are. Hazel told me he would not go back of the building to get his parked car at night without a flashlight. But that would not have given away his weakness, nor the fact that he was ashamed of it. Lots of people use flashlights freely. But he had fallen for Estelle and apparently made a lot of progress—until she had snapped out the lights and discovered how much he was afraid of the dark. Estelle told Hazel about it, gloating over it.

"She needed him after that," Hazel went on. "Nothing that anyone could tumble to, if they didn't know. But he knew. He hated her—at the same time he wanted her and was jealous of her. There was one time in the dressing room. I was there."

He had come in while they were dressing, and had picked a fight with Estelle over one of the customers. She told him to get out. When he did not do it, she snapped out the light.

"He went out of there like a jack rabbit, falling over his feet." She stopped. "How about it, Eddie? Motive enough?"

"Motive enough," I agreed. "You've got me thinking he did it. Only he couldn't."

"Only he couldn't. That's the trouble."

I told her to get into bed and try to get some sleep, that I planned to sit right where I was till the pieces fitted.

I started pounding my brain. The fact that the stage was not dark when it seemed dark changed the whole pic-

ture and eliminated, I thought, everyone not familiar with the mechanics of the Mirror. It left only Hazel, Jack, the other barman, the two waiters—and Estelle herself.

THE other barman and the two waiters Spade had eliminated. All of them had been fully alibied by one or more customers. I had alibied Jack. That left Hazel.

If Estelle's fingerprint meant what it seemed, Hazel was eliminated too. She had not had time enough to commit a murder, arrange a corpse, wipe a handle, and get downstairs to my side before Jack started the show.

But in that case, nobody could have done it. Except that the fingerprint was not conclusive. Hazel could have pushed the button with a coin or a bobby pin without destroying an old print or making a new one. I hated to admit it, but she was not clear yet.

But why should Hazel push the button? It had not given her an alibi. It didn't make sense.

Round and round and round till my head ached. It was a long time later that I went over and tugged at the covers.

"Hazel—"

"Yes, Eddie?"

"Who punched the buzzer for the eleven o'clock show?"

She considered "That show is both of us. She did. She always took charge."

"Mmmm. What other girls have worked in the Mirror?"

"Why, none. Estelle and I opened the show."

"Okay. Maybe I've got it. Let's call Spade Jones."

Spade assured me he would be only too happy to get out of a warm bed to play games with me and would I like a job walking the bugler, too? But he agreed to come to the Joy Club, with Jack Joy in tow, and to fetch enough flat feet, firearms, and muscles to cope with any situation that might arise.

It was about an hour later that I was standing back of the bar in the Joy Club, with Hazel seated where she had been when she screamed, and a cop from the Homicide Squad in my seat. Jack and Spade were at the end of the bar, where Spade could see.

"We will now show how a man can be two places at one time," I announced. "I am now Mr. Jack Joy. The time is

shortly before midnight. Hazel has just left the dressing room and come downstairs. She stops off for a moment at the little girl's room at the foot of the stairs, and thereby misses Jack, who is headed then for those same stairs. He goes up and finds Estelle in the dressing room, ready for her act."

I took a glance at Jack. His face was a taut mask, but he was a long way from breaking.

"There was an argument," I went on. "What about, I don't know, but it might have been over the trumpet boy she had swapped shows to meet. In any case, I am willing to bet that Estelle stopped the argument by switching out the dressing room light."

Jack flinched at that, and I knew I had drawn first blood. His mask cracked.

"He ran out, but he didn't stay out more than a few moments," I went on. "Probably he had a flashlight in his pocket—he's probably got one on him now—and that let him go back into that terrible, dark dressing room, and through it to the stage. Estelle was already on the stage, anointing herself with catsup, and almost ready to push the buzzer. She must have been about to do so, for she had started the egg-timer. He grabbed the prop dagger and stabbed her, stabbed her dead."

I STOPPED. I had drawn no blood from Jack this time. His mask was on firmly.

"He arranges her in the post—ten seconds for that—wipes the dagger handle and ducks out. Ten seconds more to this spot. Or make it twenty. He asks me if the buzzer has sounded, and I tell him no. He really had to know, for Estelle might have punched it before he got to her.

"Hearing the answer he wanted, Jack bustles around a bit like this—" I monkeyed with some glassware and picked up a bar spoon and pointed with it to the stage. "Note that the Mirror is lighted and empty. I've got the by-pass on. Imagine it dark, with Estelle on the altar, a knife in her heart."

I dropped the spoon down then and, while their eyes were still on the Mirror, brought the spoon's metal handle across the two binding posts which carried the two leads to the push button on the stage. The buzzer gave out with a loud *beep!*

I broke the connection by lifting the spoon for a split second, and brought it down again for a second *beep!*

"And that is how a man can— *Catch him Spade!*"

Spade was at Jack before I yelled. The three cops had him helpless in no time. He was not armed. That break for freedom had been sheer reflex. But Jack was not giving up, even now.

"You've got nothing on me," he ranted. "No evidence. Anybody could have jimmied those wires anywhere along the line."

"No, Jack," I contradicted. "I checked for that. Those wires run through the same steel conduit as the power wires, all the way from the control box to the stage. It was here or there, Jack. It couldn't be there, so it had to be here."

"I want to see my lawyer," was his only answer.

"You'll see your lawyer," Spade assured him jovially. "Tomorrow, or the next day. Right now you're going to

go down town and sit under some nice hot lights for a few hours."

"No, Lieutenant!" It was Hazel.

"Eh? And why not, Miss Dorn?"

"Don't put him under lights. Shut him in a dark closet!"

It was the mop closet they used. He lasted thirteen minutes, then he started to whimper and then to scream. They let him out, and took his confession from twitching lips.

I was almost sorry for Jack Joy when they led him away. I should not have been. Second degree was the most he could get, for premeditation was impossible to prove and quite unlikely anyhow. "Not guilty by reason of insanity" was a fair bet. But whatever his guilt, that woman had certainly driven him to it.

And imagine the nerve of the man, the pure colossal nerve, that enabled him to go through with lighting up that stage just after he looked up and saw two cops standing inside the door!



"Go Out and Find the Killer of Luther Arnold— and Bring Him In! Otherwise—"

THOSE were Johnny Stafford's orders. And they came directly from his Dad, who was giving him his last chance to make good! Johnny had been assigned the job of guarding old Arnold—and now this had happened. Arnold was murdered, and there were no clues to the crime. Even Lieutenant Ray Delmar hadn't found any.

The worst of it was—Johnny thought he himself was the murderer! He was in the clear, for he had been in the hands of the police at the time Arnold died. And yet—for reasons best known to himself, Johnny realized that he might have done the killing.

AFTERMATH OF MURDER, by Norman A. Daniels, is one of the most exciting crime novels ever to come from the pen of this popular writer! It's packed with suspense and action—and it presents as neat and baffling a murder riddle as you'll ever see pondered.

When Lieutenant Ray Delmar of Homicide, and Johnny Stafford, who hopes to become a private detective, begin their separate investigations, the surprises fly thick and fast! And all the while, in the back of Johnny Stafford's mind, is the thought of his own possible guilt.

AFTERMATH OF MURDER is a smashing full-length novel with a gripping psychological twist that will hold you spellbound. Remember—it's in the next issue!



The barrel of the Police revolver went down hard on the man's head

THE MILLS GRIND FAST

By WILLIAM HOPSON

Deputy Joe Sneed could not resist the desperate call for help made by his ex-sweetheart, movie star Rita Mardell!

SNEED leaned back in the chair and lit his cigarette, shifting both his booted feet and the Sam Brown belt at the same time. In the other room of the desert sub-station of the sheriff's office Ike Summers' voice answered the phone. He said, "Wait a minute," and then stuck his head through the doorway.

"For you, Joseph," he announced.

Sneed removed his feet from the desk top to the floor.

"That Rita Mardell gal out at Bertha's Big Rock guest ranch," added the other deputy.

Joe Sneed promptly put his feet back in their former place again, his lips thinning in exasperation. He was a big man in his early thirties and not at all handsome. It was a decidedly ugly face with the kind of mouth which gave it a naturally morose expression. Now the look was more than morose; it was sour.

"Aw, cut it out, will you, Joe?" pleaded Ike. "I know she used to be your gal before some movie scout saw her working at a drive-in eatery, serving chow in a handkerchief up here and a pair of shorts down there—woo-woo!—but she wants to talk with you."

"Tell her to go to the devil," grunted Sneed, and meant it.

"Not that luscious bundle of flesh. Not unless I could go right along with her," said Ike, grinning. "Get on the phone, Joe. The gal sounds a bit hysterical."

Joe Sneed slammed the cigarette to the floor, something vicious in the action, his uneven teeth bared in a half snarl. He didn't want his name connected with any of her publicity. It would be just like her to try something in connection with a home town cop, after that little fracas of three weeks before when she'd hurled a liquor bottle from the tenth story of a New York hotel and fractured the skull of an attendant in the parking lot below. That one had cost the studio thirty thousand in cash to square up.

With plenty of pictures of Rita—her name had been Mary when she'd lived here in Courtney—sitting solicitously at the hospital bedside of the injured man.

He picked up the phone. "Yeah," he said sourly.

"Joe?" came her voice, not low and throaty as usual. "Oh, Joe, darling, I'm so glad I got you. Come out here right away. I need you so terribly much."

"That one," he said sarcastically, "is pretty corny. You better get another script writer."

"Joe, don't be like that. Please! I'm frightened. Something terrible has happened. Come out here right away, darling."

"You call me 'darling' just once more and I'll come out there and break your blasted neck," he snapped savagely. "You don't belong in my world any more. I hate everything about you and yours. Now get to the point, Mary."

"But you must come. I'm terribly scared. Joe, darling, if you'll only come to me—"

He cut her off by banging down the receiver. Then he called the ranch again. The main ranch house. A man's voice answered. Almost meek in tone. "Big Rock ranch. This is Elwood J. Covington speaking."

"Who're you—the new maid?" Joe growled angrily.

The answer came with some dignity. "I'm a guest here. All the help is gone for the evening."

"Let me talk to Bertha."

"I believe she's in the kitchen. Hold the line."

A wait. Then a feminine bellow.

"Hello!" she bawled again.

Bertha owned the place. She was a big woman in her fifties who wore at all times a split leather riding skirt, boots, and a blue bandanna around her shock of flowing white hair. She smoked cigarettes chain fashion from an ivory holder a foot long and could, when the occasion demanded, curse like the provincial mule-skinner.

"Bertha? Joe Sneed. I just had a call from Mary—you know. Rita Mardell. What's up?"

"Nothing now. We had one beautiful brawl between Charley Waldo, her first husband, and Ramon Ralston, the director she's separated from now. Over her, I guess. Nothing to worry about now, Joe. I just worked over a mouse under Ramon's right eye. The studios expect me to keep these things quiet or I'll lose trade. Everything is under control."

"Maybe I'd better run up some county mileage to come out and have a drink with you anyhow," Joe said.

He hung up and turned, lighting a fresh cigarette.

"Stop that stupid grinning," he muttered, scowling at Ike. "Go do your leering out the window."

"The mating call," Ike snickered. "It always gets 'em, even you. Can't resist the honey who gave up love for a Hollywood contract, hah? Want me to go along, you big handsome, woman-hating brute?"

"Shut up! I'll be back in an hour or two."

HE WENT out into the warm night. The highway cut the town and tourists' tires made singing sounds on the oily pavement as they whizzed by, traveling after dark to avoid the desert's scorching heat. He unlocked the new sedan's door and slid under the wheel. Above the windshield a short-barreled riot gun rested snugly in its rack.

The town fell behind. He wound out past the last street and hit the hard paved dirt, climbing the first rise, the new car strong under his booted foot. The headlights splayed out to take in greasewood

and yucca, the latter standing gaunt and sentinel-like beneath the stars. Warm air pushed in past the ventilator and a coyote loped across the road to disappear in the night.

Mary, he thought. He'd been a lot older than she those five years back, but she had liked older men, she said. They were to have been married except that the movie scout came along and saw her lovely shape and lovely blond hair and decided she'd photograph.

He'd been a bit leary when she signed her first long-term contract, knowing that the Hollywood mill could grind up, and had ground up, a lot of marriages which otherwise might have lasted. He had, beneath his hard-bitten exterior, been pretty badly hurt when she eloped to Yuma and married an unknown actor named Charley Waldo, playing second lead in one of her pictures. When she married Ramon Ralston, her director, he'd pushed her out of his life and even his thoughts.

Her separation from Ralston three months ago, followed by the whisky bottle episode in New York, had filled him with disgust. Yet somehow the thought of seeing her again stirred him strangely. Maybe that was why he'd been so careful to keep out of her way, when she came up week-ends to stay at the Big Rock.

"What the devil," he grunted aloud to himself, swinging in at the arched gate of the ranch. "I'm talking in circles."

His wrist watch said nine o'clock. He rolled to a stop in front of the low, rambling structure where all the guests ate in a main dining room and got out. Lights from a dozen discreetly placed cabins twinkled back at him and at the stars. He went inside to the huge living room, avoiding the calfskin rugs on the slick hardwood floor. Bertha sat alone at a reading table, smoking, a quart bottle and two water tumblers at her elbow.

"At your age," he said, "I'd still like to give you a good whacking."

"At my age," she said, "I like to have you, or any man at all, give me a good whacking. Lordy, but you're ugly, Joe. Sit down and have a drink."

She poured both water tumblers half full. He said, "*Salud y pesetas*"—to your health and lots of money—and drained the glass. "Where are the gladiators?" he asked, putting down the glass.

"Ramon is in the kitchen by himself,

sulking and cooking up some kind of fancy Spanish dish. He's really Cuban, you know. Waldo left with Rita right after the scrap. He has the cabin next to hers."

"You're such a diplomatic little dear," he snorted. "Putting her first husband next to her when her second—"

Two men came in. Not exactly together but something in their manner telling of a close affinity between the two. The bigger one was about forty with a thin brown mustache and the kind of shoulders and complexion indicating a man who kept himself in top form by regular visits to the gymnasium. The other was shorter, wiry, very bright-eyed.

Sneed looked at the bigger one, mind buzzing. Then he got it. This was Merle Anderson, war time test pilot for one of the Los Angeles aircraft manufacturers, and Rita's latest companion in the Hollywood nightspots. Rumor had it that when her divorce from Ramon Ralston became final Anderson was slated to become "Mr. Mardell" number three. Sneed had seen pictures of them together, dancing cheek to cheek, sitting at tables, attending premieres of the latest films.

"Where do you fit in on this, brother?" Joe asked him bluntly.

"On what, may I ask?"

"You may ask. This brawl between Rita's first and second husband tonight?"

"Joe," Bertha cut in, "it's all over. Forget it."

"Just curious."

"I don't fit in, Mr.—"

"Sneed. Joe Sneed."

"Mr. Sneed? Glad to meet you. I'm Merle Anderson, Rita's fiance. I was in my cabin when it started. Everybody had been in a jovial mood at supper, though I noticed that Ramon wasn't saying much. I knew there was tension between him and Charley, since both of them came up here this week-end to try and get her back. That's why I came too—to see that they didn't. So I went to my cabin after we'd all eaten and then somebody said there had been a scrap. I hope this won't get into the papers, Mr. Sneed. Rita, poor kid, has had some unfortunate publicity of late and this just might put and end to her career. She means everything to me."

"She used to mean a lot to me too,"

Joe said sardonically and went out, ignoring the bright-eyed little man who had not spoken. Just stared at him with those shrewd, penetrating eyes.

The cabin was of white stucco and big, one hundred and fifty yards from the main house. Sneed knew where she would be. Bertha had pointed it out on previous visits. He hauled up before the front door and knocked.

"Mary," he called. "It's Joe."

No answer. He knocked again, then peered into the lamp lit front room. He tried the front door. It was locked by a night latch from the inside. Bracing both hands against the jambs, Joe Sneed raised a big booted foot and splintered the latch from its niche.

The front room he ignored. He went into the bedroom.

FOR a moment he thought she was asleep. She lay stretched out on her back, hands crossed over the sensuous swell of her breasts, the new red hair looking as natural as the former blond locks. Only the odd angle of her neck and the slightly discolored marks on it told him different. She had been strangled.

The mills had ground fast for "Rita Mardell."

"Poor unfortunate kid," he found himself murmuring, and placed a rough hand on her smooth cheek. It was still warm, lifelike. "And she's supposed to be the envy of a million working girls."

He stepped out into the night—and stars that weren't up in the sky slashed down into his brain as the object struck. A rock in the hands of a man, he thought, as he went down dazedly. He caught a fleeting glimpse of white shoes and legs, grabbing for them and ducking the second downward blow. The rock missed his head by an inch, thudding into the ground with force enough to have crushed his skull had it landed.

Then the assailant was gone in a run and Joe was grabbing hard at the lower right side of his Sam Brown belt. He got the gun free and let go, rolling dizzily to his knees while a trickle of blood ran down one side of his face. Flame from the gun lashed out twice in the night. The roars rolled out across the desert, past the silhouette of two private planes on the landing field apron not far from the cabins.

He went after the fleeting figure at a

run, saw him dodge back of a cabin, and sprinted forward, inwardly cursing the high-heeled boots he'd always worn. They hadn't been designed for sprinting.

Cabin doors were flooding open in a three-hundred-yard semicircle. Somebody screamed. He pulled up, panting, realizing that he'd lost his man. The front door of the main ranch house was open but the light showed the living room empty inside. He went in, heard people running and shouting behind him.

The kitchen was empty too. Joe went back and picked up the telephone, putting in a call to the sheriff's office. He waited while the line was busy for a couple of minutes. Two dozen people came pouring in, shouting and asking questions. An excited babel of voices rose.

"Shut up—all of you," he half snarled and wiped blood from his cheek with the back of his hand.

He looked at the little man with the bright eyes. The little man said nothing.

He finally got the sheriff's office, recognizing the voice of the night deputy down there on the other end. The deputy had a wife, three children, and stomach ulcers.

"Who's speaking?" he asked perfunctorily.

"Belcher the Butcher," snapped the voice at the other end.

"Well, this is Uriah the Undertaker," Joe yelled back at him. "Where's the sheriff?"

"On vacation, Joe. I thought you knew. What's up?"

"Get the coroner up here to Courtney right away. Big Rock guest ranch."

"He left on another case about an hour ago. Be back anytime."

"Where's the deputy coroner?"

"Home. Sick in bed with the flu."

"Ye gods!" roared Joe Sneed into the telephone. "Is the courthouse still there?"

"No," complained the other. "They hauled it away about ten minutes ago to provide building material for a new Veterans' Housing Unit. I'm out on the lawn in a wigwam we bought from Army Surplus."

Sneed whacked down the receiver with an angry blow that rattled the table. He turned to face his audience, wiping at the blood trickle again. He'd lost his hat out there in the fight.

"We have," he announced to the now quiet group of guests, "just had a lovely little murder here on the ranch. It happened within the past few minutes—during the time I drove six miles out here from town. The victim is Rita Mardell. She was strangled in her cabin. Quiet! Those of you who didn't know her or weren't connected with that brawl here tonight had better return to your cabins or face being suspects. And I'll lock up any man or woman who goes near the bedroom where the body is. That's all."

They cleared out in what was almost a scramble. This was unsavory business. Nobody wanted their name connected with it. Sneed went over and poured himself another drink, looking at those who remained.

Charley Waldo. His name hadn't been Waldo when, as one of the refugees from Poland, he'd put in appearance in New York to start modeling for one of the ad agencies. His Polish name had been unpronounceable. He'd spent about three years there, taken a shot at acting in a Broadway play or two with only minor success, and frequented the company of numerous rich and elderly widows.

A glorified gigolo, one of the columnists had called him, following the suicide of his latest paramour during a week of blaring headlines in the tabloids. But the public had a way of forgetting, and Hollywood's publicity men had made them forget. He played romantic leads and his slight accent made him the rave of the bobby soxers, despite the fact that he was at least thirty-five.

Joe looked down and saw both the sand burr in the cuff of his tan sport trousers and he saw the white shoes too. He said nothing.

Ramon Ralston was big but not too dark, in his forties, and right now not a handsome sight. Bertha's first aid treatment of the mouse under one eye hadn't helped much. His lip was split too. He stood scowling, sullen, a far cry from the debonair director whose line, to actors, "Make it natural, only better," was famous in the studios. His marriage to Rita had been short-lived.

Merle Anderson. Test pilot and night club figure who was her fiancé. Joe thought of the planes out there and presumed that he might have flown Rita up from Los Angeles for the week-end. Anderson said, "Do you mind, Bertha?" and poured himself a drink.

The little man with the quiet eyes. "What's your name?" Joe asked him. "Elwood Covington," was the reply.

THE voice on the telephone. Joe downed his own drink—he needed one badly to get his head clear—and then looked at them all, including Bertha sitting at the table and smoking. Few things ever fazed Bertha.

"Somebody in this room," Joe Sneed said, speaking clearly and distinctly, "killed Rita Mardell within the past fifteen or twenty minutes. It could have been Charley Waldo, her first husband, who wanted her back, according to the columnists. It could have been you, Ralston, trying to effect a reconciliation. Jealousy in both cases. It could have been you, Anderson, fearing or knowing she was making another choice. Rita was good at changing her mind, you know. And it could have been you, Bright Eyes, for some reason I don't yet know. Four people in this room."

"Five," the little man with the bright eyes murmured softly.

Joe swung on him. "Keep Bertha out of this," he said.

"Friend," murmured the other, "I wasn't referring to Bertha. I was referring to another man who was once her sweetheart. The man she deserted for a Hollywood career. You could have done it before you stepped into the ranch tonight. I was listening in on the house extension when you talked to the late Miss Mardell. I believe you threatened to 'break her blasted neck.' Ironically, that seems to be exactly what happened. Five, friend. I mean you too."

Joe Sneed took two long strides forward and got the little man by his coat lapels. He lifted hard. Some kind of a killing rage was possessing him, why he didn't know. Maybe on account of poor unfortunate Rita, whom he'd once so loved. Maybe because of this little man's imperturbability.

"Suppose," Sneed gritted, "that you just tell us where you fit in on this."

The little man's feet were almost off the floor, only his toes touching. He braced himself by grabbing at Joe's big left wrist and managed to get into view a silver badge. Joe let him down and stepped back.

"Private dick, eh? One of those wise eyes who're always solving cases just ahead of the cops. Maybe you could

solve this one?"

"Maybe," came the murmured reply, "I could."

"Where do you fit into the picture?"

Merle Anderson stirred beside the table where he stood. "I can explain that, Mr. Sneed," he said. "Mr. Covington is in my pay. Because of threats made by both Mr. Waldo and Mr. Ralston to Rita during the past week when she said she was coming up here, I hired him as her bodyguard. I had no intention of coming up until I heard of those threats."

"He's a hell of a fine bodyguard," Joe grunted, and paced to the end of the room. He wheeled to face them.

"I want each one of you to tell me exactly where you were during the past twenty minutes or so—from the time I talked to Rita on the phone just before leaving town. We'll start with you, Bertha. It might help place the others. Where'd you go after talking with me on the phone?"

"Out to strangle Rita," Bertha said calmly, pulling a butt from the ivory holder and inserting a fresh cigarette. "She raised so much trouble with her temperamental fits that it was bad for business. Several of the other guests have threatened to leave. So I went out and strangled her."

"Cut the comedy, Bertha," he snapped. "Where were you?"

"I wasn't at the house at all, Joe," she replied, growing serious. "Right after talking to you I went to the pig pens out at the barn. You know my prize porkers. One is sick and I was there for a good fifteen minutes. I got back just in time to set out the bottle and glasses before you arrived."

"See anybody on the way back?"

"Yes. A man coming out of Rita's cabin. Slipping out. But I won't be able to identify him. It was too dark."

"By the way, you're a widow with quite a lot of dough, aren't you?" he asked suddenly.

"Why, Joey," she said coyly. "I thought you were interested in me, not my money."

He let that one pass. Few things seldom fazed Bertha.

"Where were you?" he said to Anderson.

"In my cabin all the time."

"Waldo?"

"In my cabin all the time."

"I suppose," Joe grunted at the scowling director, "that—"

"No," said Rita's separated husband, "I souped in the kitchen first and then—"

"I know! Then you went to your cabin."

"And I too," murmured Elwood Covington sadly. "Dereliction of duty. I went to smoke my pipe for a few minutes and then, by so doing, lost the life of my client."

Joe Sneed let out something of a sigh. Everything was letter perfect. Too perfect. But something was taking shape in his mind: the theory that a murderer will kill again when in fear of being discovered. He turned to Charley Waldo.

"You can," he stated in a level voice, "start explaining about trying to crush in my skull with that rock a few minutes ago. Cut out the stalling, Waldo," he half snarled at the man's darkly handsome face with the pepper-and-salt hair at the temples. Waldo was beginning to protest, his accent deepened. "You're the only man here wearing white shoes. I grabbed at them as I went down. That sand burr in the cuff of your pants was collected as you ducked away back of the cabins among the weeds. Out with it!"

The others were staring at him, almost in horriification. Waldo began to twist first one thin hand and then the other. He swallowed hard.

"Very well, Mr. Sneed," he finally got out. "I heard somebody try to crash in Rita's door. I thought it was Ramon, who's been threatening her unless she came back to him. I feared violence. So I stepped out of my cabin next to hers and struck at the man who emerged from the door. I—I'm afraid I was trying to kill him."

"I'm afraid," Joe grunted, glaring at him, "that you almost succeeded."

He turned his back on the man to face Bertha. A hard glint had come into his eyes.

"Bertha," he said coldly, "you've been stalling long enough. You're protecting somebody for some reason, maybe because of the scandal and what it might do to your business. I know you recognized the murderer who slipped out of Rita's cabin. I'm going to clear these men out of here and then you're going to tell me who it was."

Then he closed an eye in a deliberate wink.

BERTHA was fast on the uptake. She didn't know what was in the offing but she rose to the occasion. She flicked ashes from the long object and nodded.

"All right, Joe, since you force me to. I think I can tell you."

Sneed turned on the four men. "Go to your cabins," he ordered. "Don't try to leave the ranch by any method. In a few minutes I'm going to arrest the man who strangled Rita Mardell."

They filed out.

The bright-eyed little man, Covington, was the last to go. He looked at Joe Sneed almost sadly.

"Five, friend," he murmured. "Five. And I lost a client."

It became silent in the room as the door closed behind him. Just Joe Sneed's big form and Bertha's bulky figure sitting calmly at the table.

"And now?" she inquired.

He shook his head and waited. He waited a minute or so. He looked at her.

"I think I've just baited a trap for a murderer," he said to her. "He'll want to know if you really can identify him. He'll be outside, I think."

"And I'm the bait? Why, you rat!"

"Nothing to worry about—" he started to say and then he didn't say it. A car door outside had rattled, and Joe Sneed suddenly cursed himself for a stupid fool. His car.

The riot gun.

Somebody was taking the riot gun from its rack in the county police car!

"Douse that light!" he yelled at her. "Where's the switch? Douse it, Bertha!"

She could move fast for a big woman. She moved. She almost leaped at the wall and clicked the room into darkness as movement came at the open window. She fell flat and thunder split the room. The riot gun roared.

It roared again, lashing blunt-nosed fire into the room.

Sneed had jerked his gun free, its crash mingling with that of the shotgun. A cry came from outside and the weapon clattered to the dirt. The window was pretty small and Joe was past six feet but he took it in a running dive and landed on top of a man who had gone down. The barrel of the Police revolver went down hard on a man's head and Joe rose.

"All right, Bertha," he called. "I got him."

"Well," groaned her voice tiredly from the darkness, "this has certainly been a nice little clam bake. I need a drink."

She switched on the lights again and took one—a big one—and the deputy came around to the door carrying a man in his arms. He put Merle Anderson down on the floor and half sat him up against the wall. Blood was on his shirt front and his eyes were half glazed. His lips worked. Outside people were running again.

"I don't know whether you're going to live or not," Joe Sneed said, pulling aside the sport coat. "You've been hit pretty bad. Why did you kill her, Anderson?"

"Rita? I—always spent more money than my job pays. She got tired of paying the night spot bills. Then I tried to blackmail her. Threatened ugly stories about her and me. She—said she wanted the week-end to think it over. I flew her up."

"Why the private dick to guard her, if you—"

"Intended to kill her? I didn't. Hiring Covington was on the level. Waldo and Ramon *had* made threats. But when she called me in tonight and told me no more bad publicity could hurt her any worse than—that business in New York, and then threatened to expose me, I lost my head. Strangled her. Figured Waldo or her husband would be blamed—"

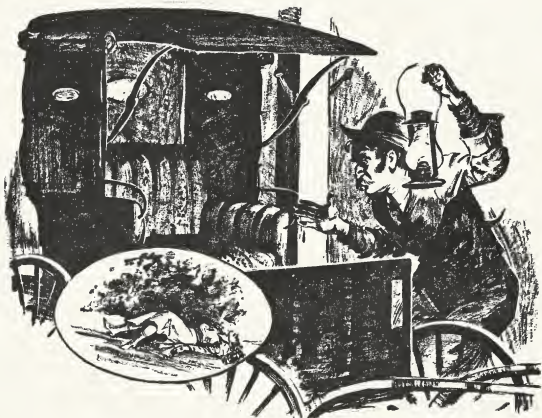
He started coughing and Joe got up. The room was filling. Sneed suddenly felt stifled. He rose to his feet and went out into the night. The stars seemed down close and off in the distance a coyote howled. Some strange instinct took his feet toward the cabin where the body of Rita Mardell lay. He went inside and looked down at her, at the face still warm, at the once blond hair lying in lovely red folds around her shoulders.

He placed a rough hand in the hair, feeling the silky texture against his fingers.

"So-long, kitten," he murmured at the girl who hadn't been able to take fame and public adulation in stride. "I'm sorry it had to turn out this way . . . Mary."

Then he went back to the main ranch house to phone and find out if the coroner had returned.

Read Our Companion Magazine THRILLING DETECTIVE—15c Everywhere!



The liveryman saw that the seat was clotted with blood

KITTY TAKEN FOR A RIDE

By LEO MARR

Educated horses in Minneapolis trot to their stables without drivers—and one brings home deadly evidence in a smart rig!

KITTY GING was taken for a ride—and it was no joke, son, especially for Kitty.

At half-past eight on the evening of December 3, 1894, a driverless horse, pulling a covered buggy, came trotting down Nicollet Avenue in downtown Minneapolis. Gas lamps shed sputtering and meagre circles of light over the dark and wintry street, but the few pedestrians abroad paid no attention to the driverless rig. It was common practice for buggy renters to drive directly home when finished with the rig and turn the

horse loose; whereat the intelligent animal took itself back to the stable without guidance.

Lucy, the buckskin mare, turned into Grant Street and thence into the Palace Livery Stable and stopped in her accustomed place. The attendant on duty, Harry Gilbert, unhitched the mare, watered her and led her to her stall. Then he set about a routine cleaning of the buggy, for the Palace took pride in the condition of its equipment.

He saw immediately that something was rotten in Minneapolis. The reins

AN AMAZING TRUE STORY OF CRIME

were properly wrapped about the whip-socket, but this was the only thing ship-shape about the buggy. The first thing Gilbert noticed was that the good wool lap robe furnished as part of the equipment, was missing.

A Vehicle Splashed with Blood

A disturbing odor, not part of the usual smells of leather and horse, assailed his nostrils. Gilbert brought a lantern and peered into the buggy. There was a little pool of clotted blood on the seat. The back cushions were splashed with blood and there were smears, as from a bloody hand, on the iron bows which supported the top.

Frightened, Gilbert went to the big ledger containing the day's bookings and looked to see who had hired the rig. The sight of a familiar name further alarmed him—Catherine M. Ging was an old and valued client. She was, at thirty, the well-to-do proprietor of Minneapolis' most fashionable dressmaking establishment.

According to the record, Miss Ging had had Lucy and the buckboard delivered to her at seven o'clock that evening at the West Hotel instead of at the Ozark Flats, the fashionable apartment house where she lived. It was now only nine, and it appeared that in less than two hours, tragedy had struck.

Kitty Ging was a dashing creature—glamorous would be the word today—of a full and mature beauty. She had instinctive good taste in clothes and knew how to wear them, being such an excellent advertisement of her own wares that the social elect of Minneapolis—wives and daughters of the timber barons and flour kings and beer monarchs—flocked to her for their apparel.

Unmarried at thirty, she led a hectic and somewhat "fast" social life, but remained eminently respectable.

"The breath of scandal," reported a Minneapolis paper chastely, "had never touched this young woman's skirts."

Scandal or no, Harry Gilbert of the Palace Livery was very much afraid that something had happened to Kitty Ging. He so reported to his employers and then to the police.

The Body in the Park

Meanwhile, a hitherto unrelated event had taken place earlier. About eight o'clock, a homebound baggageman for

the Soo Line Railroad had stumbled across the body of a young woman on a lonely road fringing Lake Calhoun, in the city's park system. Unidentified, this body lay in Hennepin County Morgue until detectives, checking Gilbert's call, at last drew inferences from the presence of a dead young woman with the information that a certain Catherine Ging was missing under circumstances suggesting foul play.

Kitty Ging had died a death of violence. Her face was battered and her nose broken. Her left eye had been gouged from its socket. In pushing it back, the coroner felt a hard object which turned out to be a bullet. Turning the head, he discovered a hole over the right ear where the bullet had entered, to drive through and push the eye out of place before it came to rest.

Detectives went to the Palace Livery to check the buggy and hear Gilbert's story. From him they took the address of the fashionable Ozark Flats. They arrived there about eleven and found the proprietors of the livery stable making their own anxious inquiries.

While the questioning was in progress, Harry T. Hayward, son of the landlord, came home. He had just been to the Grand Opera House with a young lady and had just escorted her home.

"Miss Ging was a good friend of mine," Hayward said sadly. "How did it happen?"

"Don't know." The detectives had not yet heard the coroner's report and knew nothing of the bullet. "Come down to the police station and tell us everything you can about her."

Anxious to be helpful, Mr. Hayward wagged his tongue freely down at the station house.

"In my opinion," he said firmly, "Kitty was murdered. Yes, murdered. For her money. She had a bad habit of carrying large sums of money with her and she was most careless in letting people see it. I warned her time and again that she was simply looking for trouble."

The coroner's report came in. Kitty Ging had been murdered. Cause of death apparently a revolver bullet fired into her head at close range, during or after a sharp struggle.

"Murder!" Hayward cried strangely, jolted out of his calm, though murder he had been naming it all evening. "There goes my money!"

The detectives looked at one another. "What money?" they asked. "This is the first we heard of any money."

"I lent it to her," Hayward said, shaking. "She wanted it to enlarge her dress shop and add a millinery department. I'm done!"

Overcome with grief, the detectives thought. For his two thousand dollars, not for his good friend, Kitty Ging.

Enter the Handsome Gambler

Hayward's relationship with the dead girl seemed worth going into, in their opinion, though his alibi for the time of the murder was iron-clad. He was the son of W. W. Hayward, wealthy real estate operator and owner of much important realty in Minneapolis. Though he had a brother named Adry, Harry was the favorite son, spoiled by his father and mother.

He had a large allowance, plus his father's ready checkbook to fall back upon every time he got into difficulty, which he did with monotonous regularity. At a very early age he undertook the study of such sciences as faro and roulette, at which he seemed to be a bad pupil, judging by the amounts he lost. But no amount of losses could shake his determination to master the games, and he stayed with it until his father's bank account screamed for help.

He was tall and handsome, had an elegant mustache and wore excellent clothes. But, strangely enough he did not care much for women and was not rated as a ladies' man. Nor did his vices include a fondness for liquor. He was a gambler—and a deadpan gambler at that.

Yet he told the police that he and Kitty Ging had been in love for months.

"I told her I had a weakness for gambling," he recounted, "but it did not upset her. In fact, she often gave me small sums of money to play for her. And she was a good sport about losing. Then she stopped gambling. She told me she needed every cent she had to enlarge her shop. She had three thousand dollars and needed seven thousand more. I lent it to her. What with other loans and some money I had deposited with her to keep for me, she owed me a total of ninety-five hundred dollars."

Who Owed the Money?

Hayward produced notes for this amount all properly signed by Catherine

M. Ging. "What security did you have for these loans?" he was asked.

"Two life insurance policies for five thousand each. I have those policies in my possession."

He went on to say that on the day of the murder, Kitty Ging had drawn a large sum of money, "ten or twelve thousand dollars" from the bank.

"That ridiculous habit she had of liking to carry lots of money with her," Hayward said, shaking his head. "And it isn't as though she weren't warned. Last April, Thomas Waterman, Miss Ging, a Miss Ella Vedder and myself went driving around Lake Calhoun. Not far from where she was found tonight, we were held up and robbed by a masked man. Miss Ging carried a lot of money, as usual, and lost it all. The rest of us lost nothing but small change."

Having talked himself empty, Harry Hayward went home. He was not a suspect, for his movements that fateful evening were clear enough. He had called for his date at eight o'clock, chatted amiably with her parents for a while and then left with the girl for the theatre. At eight-thirty, he had been in his seat, waiting for the curtain to go up, in plain sight of thirty people who knew him. Nor had he been out of sight of at least one person for the rest of the evening. Kitty Ging's tragic death and the romantic details surrounding it had all the natural ingredients to make it a sensation. The sob sisters of the press and the budding tabloids who traded on sensationalism, leaped upon the story with little cries of joy. Minneapolis read, talked and thought of nothing else for days. The girl was attractive, wealthy and too well-known for her death not to cause more than a ripple in the city's current.

There came, at this time, a tip to the police which, properly followed up, might have solved the case then and there. A newspaper writer named Briggs told the police that several months before, he had done a newspaper exposé of Harry Hayward's gambling methods. Hayward had threatened to have Briggs beaten up. The man who was to do the beating, Briggs had learned, was the superintendent—or engineer—of the Ozark Flats.

The police ignored Briggs. But the next tip came from a source too influential to ignore. Albert H. Hall, assistant

county attorney, received a letter from Levi M. Stewart, Minneapolis old-timer and one of its wealthiest citizens. Mr. Stewart had a tale to unfold.

Three days before Kitty Ging had met her fate on a dark road, Adry Hayward, the unspoiled brother of the gambler, had come to see Stewart. In great excitement, Adry had told Stewart that his brother Harry was planning to kill Kitty Ging for her insurance.

Harry had framed an elaborate set-up, somehow talking Miss Ging into displaying large sums of money so people would think her death was the result of robbery. He had also faked loans to her so that her assigning her insurance policies to him would appear to be in the nature of security for these non-existent loans.

A Terrible Blunder

Stewart had thought Harry Hayward a rascal, but not a killer. He had pooh-poohed Adry's fears and sent him off. But now, in the light of what had happened, he could not longer evade the belief that he had made a terrible blunder in not taking the young man's story more seriously.

State Attorney Frank Nye did not release the contents of the Stewart letter. But he did issue a warrant for Harry Hayward's arrest on suspicion. Hayward was, of course, greatly grieved at this sign of man's inhumanity to man. It interrupted his mourning. He had been about to accompany Miss Ging's body back to her home town of Auburn, New York, for burial.

The same day Adry Hayward was arrested as Harry's accomplice, and charged with being the actual murderer, while Harry made good his alibi at the theatre.

Adry tried not to talk, and tried to shield his brother, but eventually, at the urging of Stewart, told all he knew. Harry had in truth, approached him with the plan to kill Kitty Ging for her insurance. And he continued to urge him for a month. At last Harry had told him that he had found a man who would do the job—the superintendent at the Ozark Flats, a man named Claus A. Blixt.

The police remembered they had heard the name Blixt before. It was he who was supposed to beat up Briggs, the newspaper man who had written an

article exposing Harry Hayward. Accordingly, Blixt and his wife were arrested.

A Swede with Nothing to Say—Volubly

Blixt had nothing to say. And he said it. Deputies, attorneys and Mayor Eustis, who was taking a personal interest in the case, hammered at him in vain. Then Mayor Eustis noticed that Blixt's name appeared as witness on the promissory notes made out to Hayward and signed by Kitty Ging. He was assured anew that Blixt was involved.

Eustis changed his tactics. He saw Blixt alone. He talked to him quietly and with kindness. Blixt unbent a little. He told the mayor he had been born in Sweden, but had spent most of his life as a farm hand, then had come to Minneapolis to be in succession, a street-car conductor, a bartender and a stationary engineer. He was forty-one years old, had been married twice before and was madly in love with his present wife. This turned out to be a factor of some importance.

His alibi for the night of the murder was simple enough.

"I went down to South Minneapolis to collect a dollar and a half a feller owed me. He wasn't home. Then I had a few beers and went to a jewelry store to get my watch fixed. Then I went home and went to bed."

He clung to the story despite pressure that brought the perspiration out in great drops on his forehead and parched his mouth and dried his voice to a croak.

Eustis sent him back to his cell to stew a while. Next day Blixt asked for the mayor. He had a new story.

"Mr. Hayward asked me to meet him at Lake Calhoun at eight o'clock. He came, driving a buggy and Miss Ging was inside dead. I heard the shot before he came. I—"

"Sorry, Claus," interrupted the mayor. "At eight o'clock Harry Hayward was sitting in the orchestra at the Grand Opera House with a young lady."

Blixt was sent back to his cell to stew for another twenty-four hours. And then he broke. He made a confession that stuck through all the hammering of defense attorneys.

"I shot her!" Blixt said. But if his was the finger that actually had squeezed the trigger, it was the brain of Harry Hayward that had directed the shot.

The trial, in late January, cleared Adry Hayward of any implication. It pointed the finger of accusation directly at Harry Hayward.

The true story of the Ging murder was even more sensational than the wildest imaginings of the sob sisters. Kitty had been wildly infatuated with the handsome Harry and he, the cold-blooded gambler always, used her love solely to get money for his own ends. She was an excellent business woman, but not where Harry was concerned. Far from borrowing money from him, it was he who borrowed money from her. Yet she willingly made out and signed notes which showed her as the borrower instead!

All she asked in return was his attention. He took her to dinners and theatres and for buggy rides—and she picked up the check. He made “investments” for her and gambled for her, and she invariably lost. The holdup near Lake Calhoun which Hayward himself had told the police about, was undoubtedly staged by Hayward and the money Kitty carried he had persuaded her to withdraw from the bank so that he could get his hands on it. He had even involved her in an insurance swindle; burning down a flour mill she owned for the insurance.

Eventually, of course, he tired of her. Even the money he got did not seem enough to repay him for the time he spent on her, for enduring the affection she lavished upon him. He didn't want to be kissed or fondled by her and she persisted in doing it. Furthermore, she wanted to get married and that was the last straw. It occurred to Hayward that he could get rid of her and cash in heavily at once by getting her to name him as beneficiary in her insurance and then killing her.

Gambler's Threat

It took him five months, during which he made a thorough study of insurance. Finally he persuaded her that, since they were to be married, they should each take out insurance in favor of the other. Kitty agreed eagerly. She seemed to be getting nearer her goal. Her insurance was valid, Hayward saw to that. His own was faked.

With the stage set, one more thing was necessary. He needed a triggerman.

Himself, he had to be elsewhere when the murder was done, for he would need an alibi. The accomplice he chose was the dim-witted Blixt.

Claus was far from a murderer. He recoiled at the idea and no amount of promises or bribes would move him. But Hayward found the key in his passionate love for his wife. Hayward threatened to kill Mrs. Blixt if Claus did not consent to help him. Blixt was not smart enough to wonder why Hayward was ready to kill Mrs. Blixt and yet refused to kill Kitty Ging. Fearfully, he gave in and promised to do the job.

Hayward set the stage. He made a date for himself with the girl he was to take to the Grand Opera Theatre. Then he called on Kitty and made arrangements for her to rent a buggy from the Palace Livery, to be delivered to the West Hotel at seven o'clock.

A Wild Story

Just what wild story he told her will probably never be known. But Kitty was used to him and his elaborate schemes and evidently was ready to agree to anything.

Following instructions, she took the buggy to Lyndale Avenue and waited. Hayward meanwhile went to get Blixt.

“Put on your coat and come along,” he ordered.

Blixt shuddered, pleaded, all but wept. Hayward shoved a revolver upon the frightened man, with six extra cartridges of a different length.

“After you have shot her,” Hayward said, “empty the gun of all cartridges and put these longer ones in. Then throw the short cartridges into the furnace. Leave the revolver under the pillow of my bed.”

Hayward and Blixt went out into the night and walked to Lyndale Avenue where Kitty waited. Hayward gave them elaborate driving instructions. They were to drive around Lake Calhoun and he would meet them with another team where they would exchange horses and drive back.

Pointing to Blixt, Hayward said, “He's one of the gang too.”

Miss Ging nodded as though this meant something to her, but what fantastic story he had told her, Blixt was unable to say. They got into the buggy and drove off, while Harry Hayward

(Concluded on page 112)



Her eyes were wild as Rod Carter dove straight at her

CARGO OF DEATH

By WYATT BLASSINGAME

Game Warden Carter couldn't help smelling decayed trout on the launch, nor could he keep his nose out of murder!

THE BOAT rose and fell with the swells about ten miles off shore. Rod Carter, the game warden, stood in his own launch, frowning as he studied the boat through the glasses. It was a thirty or thirty-four foot launch of the type commonly used by the mullet and trout fishermen along Florida's west coast. It lay dead in the water, unanchored, and not a person was visible aboard.

Carter's launch approached the other from down wind and when he was still fifty feet away he could smell the fish—very old and very dead fish. What goes on, he thought, the frown deepening on his face.

He was a short, stocky man with red hair and the kind of skin that sun and wind turn red instead of brown. Against this bright red face his blue eyes had a quick, alive look, as though he were eter-

nally curious about something. He swung his own launch so that it circled up wind from the other, out of the smell.

"Hello there! Who's aboard?" he shouted, throttling back on his motor.

There was no answer. The other boat rocked gently with the waves, apparently deserted.

Rod Carter regarded it with his shoulders tilted a little forward, his head cocked to one side. Anyone seeing him then would have understood the nickname of Curious Carter. It was as though he were infected with a kind of itch, which, once he became interested in something, would not let him rest until he knew all about it.

"Okay," he said aloud after a moment, and brought his boat skillfully alongside the other.

The first thing he saw was the trout, several hundred pounds of it. But it would never bring any price on the market now. It was bloated by at least two days in the hot sun, maybe more. The odor was almost unbearable.

And then Carter saw the man. He lay face down on the deck, near the engine. He wore dungarees and a dirty undershirt, and the skin of his arms and shoulders was blackish and swollen; it looked as though it would explode at the prick of a pin. The face was turned toward Carter, balloonlike, the eyes open with only the whites showing. The mouth was open too, the lips swollen so that the teeth showed.

Rod Carter felt his stomach turn seasickish. He had an impulse to shove away from the boat, get out of sight and smell—but he knew that instead of that he would go aboard and investigate.

"Because the guy was catching trout," he told himself. The season on trout had been closed for two weeks.

Carrying a line with him so that the launches would not drift apart he crawled into the fishing boat, knelt beside the man's body. Then he saw that across the back of the man's head there was a deep welt of long-dried blood.

"So—" Carter muttered aloud.

He could see into the small cabin, see the length and breadth of the boat: the dead man, the rotting fish, nets and tackle—nothing else. But it wasn't likely that one man had worked those nets alone, Carter thought. Three men would be more probable, or at least two.

Strange accidents can happen on the

water, as Rod Carter knew. Working at the nets a man can easily fall overboard. And this man might have slipped and struck his head on the engine. Or there may have been a fight, and someone hit this man over the head, then fell overboard himself, or left in another boat. There were endless possibilities, so many he would have no peace puzzling about them.

Making a line fast to the bow of the fishing-boat, Carter climbed back into his launch. He fastened the line to its stern, headed toward the mainland.

It wasn't his business to decide what had happened in the other boat; that was the cop's headache. And yet. . . He thought of the bloody welt across the back of the dead man's head. Hit from behind, Carter thought. Somebody slugged him from behind, without giving him a chance. And the guy, or guys, who did it were mixed up in taking those trout out of season.

"I'll have to hang a fine on them," he said aloud.

He felt better now that he had figured a way to get himself involved in the matter.

DOCKS, with fish-houses beside many of them, reached out into the bay. Between the docks there were racks over which fishnets, like huge spiderwebs, were hung to dry. Beyond was the fishing village of Balboa.

Rod Carter brought his launch and tow alongside one of the fish-houses, threw a line to Owen Powell, the owner of the fish-house, who stood on the dock.

"Good heavens, Curious," Powell exclaimed. "What kind of smell are you bringing in here?"

"It'll raise more stink than you know," Carter muttered. He jerked his thumb at the fishing boat. "Who is the guy there?"

"What guy? It's Tom Bartlett's boat."

"The guy on the deck," Carter said.

"Beside the engine."

"Wher—"

Powell's voice stopped before the word was complete. He was a powerfully built man with a dark, hawklike face. Some of the blood went out of his face now leaving the deeply sunburned skin looking yellow.

"It's Tom Bartlett! What happened to him?"

"You guess," Carter said. "To me it

looks like somebody slugged him."

"Who? When?"

"You know more about it than I do. I just found him floating around in the gulf."

"It must have been—"

Owen Powell stopped. He had remembered something and it had showed almost like a light flashing across his dark eyes. Then it was gone and his face was expressionless.

"Been what?" Carter prodded.

"I saw him Sunday night at the Cabbage Palm jook," Owen Powell said.

"That's three days ago. I haven't seen him since. He must have gone out Monday and been killed, just like—"

"Like what?"

"The old woman said—" He stopped, looking toward the end of the dock. "Here's Linda Bartlett," he said quickly. "Tom's wife. She's been looking for him. The old woman sent her."

A girl was coming down the dock, running. And then, half way to them, she stopped. She was a tall, blond girl, full bosomed, her features large and bold. At some other time she might have been very pretty, Rod Carter thought. Now her face, without makeup, was too pale, her mouth twisted by terror, her eyes too wide and with fear like a living thing within them. He stood there, staring at Tom Bartlett's boat and then, slowly, her face turned, not her eyes, and she looked first at Carter, then Owen Powell.

"Tom?" she said. "Where—"

Powell went down the dock to her.

"Steady, Linda," he said.

"It's Tom's boat!"

"Yes."

"Where—"

He put his hand on her arm. "There's been an accident, Linda."

"I want to see him!"

"No. It's too late."

"He's dead!" She almost screamed it. "Something happened to him Monday afternoon! Ma saw it! She saw it all! She knew he was dead!" She broke away from Powell and came running down the dock.

Rod Carter stepped in her way and she ran against him, almost without seeing him, so that they staggered back along the dock. Carter caught her by the arms. "Take it easy."

She was as tall as he was, and looking past him, over his shoulder, she could

see into the boat. She made a cry that was wordless, almost animal-like, and put her hands over her face. Then the strength went out of her and she would have fallen if Carter had not held her erect.

Other persons were coming out on the dock now. Someone took the girl from Carter's arms, others began to gather around the boat. Carter pushed them back.

"Keep everybody away," he said to Owen Powell. "Don't let them touch the boat. I'll call the cops."

"All right. But hurry."

"Who usually fished with Bartlett?"

Owen Powell looked at him steadily for a long moment. Then, finally, he said, "Bill Singer and Ed Graves."

"Thanks," Carter said. But as he turned away he stopped again, looking back at Powell. "What did that girl mean when she said her mother saw Bartlett killed?"

"It was Bartlett's mother, her mother-in-law," Powell explained. "The old lady saw it in a vision." And suddenly there was a look of mingled fear and hatred on the man's dark, hawklike face. "She's seen death before—and maybe caused it. She's a witch."

"And you are nuts," Carter said.

The big man stood there in the clear, late afternoon sunshine. "All right," he said. "I don't believe in such things myself. But I do about her."

THE woman said, "I'm Mrs. Singer. Bill ain't home yet. He went mullet fishing today on one of Owen Powell's boats."

"I thought he fished with Tom Bartlett," Carter said.

"He did sometimes."

"Do you remember if he was fishing with Bartlett on Monday?"

He saw the instant suspicion in the woman's eyes. She had been standing in the doorway, but now she stepped back a little, letting the screen door close between them.

"I don't know who he fished with," she said. "Not on Monday."

"But he was fishing?"

"I don't know. Sometimes he just goes out and sets around. How do I know where he goes?"

"He wasn't home?"

The suspicion in the woman's eyes had changed to fear now and to the hatred

that fear breeds.

"What business is it of yours? Maybe he was, maybe he wasn't. What do you want to know for?"

"Business reasons," Rod Carter said.

His only interest was in who caught those trout out of season, he told himself, trying to believe that. He turned and went down the steps into the thickening twilight and along the rutted sand road toward the center of the village. A mosquito whined by his ear and he slapped at it. When he passed some boys playing he asked where Ed Graves lived.

"Down that way," one of them said. "But he ain't home. He's at the Cabbage Palm jook."

"Thanks," Carter said.

The Cabbage Palm was a typical Florida jook; semi-dark and intimate and none too clean; a bar, booths, a couple of pinball machines, a jook organ going full blast. There was one couple dancing, three or four men and women at the bar.

The bartender looked like an aging but happy cherub. "Hello, Curious," he said.

"How's it going?" Carter asked. "Bourbon and soda."

The bartender turned to reach for the bottle—and it was suddenly as though another person, a leering, evil old man, had appeared by magic inside his clothes. But when he swung back to the bar again he was once more cherubic.

Seen from directly in front the change was understandable: the left eye was a happy blue, but he had a cast in his right eye which gave it a sinister leer and the right corner of his mouth had been cut in a knife fight years before, leaving that corner twisted into a snarl.

He put Carter's drink in front of him.

"I hear it was you that found Tom Bartlett's body," he said. "What do you think happened to him?"

"I'm a game warden, not a cop."

He didn't like being curious, he just couldn't help it. He liked to pretend that he had no interest in anything—but he went right on being interested.

"You know what I think?" the bartender said. From the left side of his face he beamed at Carter like a happy angel. "I think somebody killed him."

Someone at the other end of the bar called for a drink and the bartender went off. Carter sipped his whisky, wonder-

ing which of the men along the bar was Ed Graves. They were all talking about Bartlett and what had happened to him. "I'll bet you Linda is already out throwing a party," one man said.

"I hear she almost threw a fit when she saw his body," a girl said.

"Then it must have been a act. She hated the guy."

"She didn't hate him so much," one of the men said, "as she just liked other men."

"And does she like 'em!"

"You ought to know, Ed."

The man called Ed laughed loudly. He was a blond man with a handsome but not very intelligent face. His eyes were bloodshot now and when he laughed saliva flecked the corner of his mouth.

"Reckon I'll have to call on her before long and help her spend that insurance money."

"Did she get much?" one of the girls asked.

"He still had his Government insurance from when he was in the Navy. And I think he had about two thousand more."

"Ed's been checking up on those things."

The bartender came back to stand near Carter.

"From what I hear," the game warden said, "Tom Bartlett's wife got around quite a bit."

The bartender favored Carter with the leery side of his face.

"Yeah. That's why Tom moved down to Toleton, trying to get her away from Owen Powell. He's the last one she took after. But Tom was crazy about her."

"Then he wasn't still living here?"

"Nope. He took his wife and old mother to Toleton three, four months ago. But these last few weeks, with the season closed on trout and the mullet scarce, he'd been back here alone."

"He didn't fish alone?" Carter asked.

"Oh no. Ed Graves or Bill Singer or both usually worked with—"

He stopped, and after a moment began to rub at the bar, only the angelic side of his face turned to Carter.

"Who was with him Monday?" Carter asked.

"What's it to you?" The blond man who had been called Ed was beside Carter now. "What do you want to know for, Rod?"

"I want to know," Carter said, "because I figure it's my business. I'm a game warden. And don't blow your breath in my face, Bud. It smells."

The man laughed and wiped at the saliva which flecked the corner of his mouth.

"Tough, ain't you?"

"As I need to be," Carter said. "Your name Graves?"

"So what?"

"You fished with Tom Bartlett, I understand."

"You understand a devil of a lot. Sure I fished with him sometimes. But I didn't kill him, if that's what's bothering you."

"I don't give a darn who killed him," Carter said. "I want to know who helped him catch those trout."

Ed Graves blinked at him. And then he began to laugh again.

"You the one found him, ain't you? A dead man in a boat full of fish. And you don't care how the guy died, you want to know who helped catch the fish." He spat on the floor, missing Carter's shoe by an inch. "Well, I didn't. Now get out of the way, little man, and let me out."

ROD CARTER didn't move. He was beginning to grin and his eyes, bright blue in his red face, were like those of a gamecock looking at his opponent.

"All right, Bud," he said, sounding almost happy now, "what are you going to do?" The one thing he honestly liked was a fight.

The bartender tapped on the bar with a bottle. "Go on, Ed," he said.

Ed Graves looked at him and back at Carter. After a moment he spat on the floor and walked around him and out the door.

Carter sighed and turned back to the bar. "I should have known he wouldn't start anything," he said unhappily. "Those blabbermouths always back down."

"He's afraid to start anything when he's drinking," the bartender said. "Old Mrs. Bartlett told him he was going to get killed fighting in a bar, and ever since then he's been scared to start anything. But he will sooner or later, and he'll get it sure."

"Was it Tom's mother who told him that?"

[Turn page]

FIND OUT WHY THE **DEAF** CALL IT A MIRACLE

This ONE
Tiny Unit is ALL
You Wear

About 1/2 size
and weight
of old-style
hearing aids.

More
people wear
BELTONE
than all other
one-unit
hearing aids
combined.



You'd call this new BELTONE Mono-Pac Hearing Aid a miracle, too, if you had been wearing a separate battery pack strapped to your body, with entangling wires, and then suddenly found the new



Beltone

ONE-UNIT
HEARING AID

BELTONE HEARING AID CO.
1450 W. 19th St., Dept. TG-75, Chicago 8, Ill.

FREE BOOKLET—MAIL COUPON



Beltone Hearing Aid Co., Dept. TG-75
1450 W. 19th St., Chicago 8, Ill.

Please send me, without obligation, FREE Booklet about Hearing Problems.

Name _____

Address _____

Town _____ Zone _____ State _____

PICTURE RING \$1.



Exquisite Picture Ring—made from any photo.
SEND NO MONEY! Mail photo with paper strip for ring size. Pay postman only \$1 plus postage. Hand tinted for ring size. Photo returned with ring. Money back guarantee. 25c extra. Photo returned with ring. Money back guarantee. SEND PHOTO AND RING SIZE NOW!
PICTURE RING CO. Dept. K-26, CINCINNATI 2, Ohio

Made from
any photo
or picture
SEND NO
MONEY!

THE MYSTERIOUS WORLD WITHIN YOU

Those strange feelings of intuition and premonition are the urges of your inner self. Within you there is a world of unlimited power. Learn to use it and you can do the right thing at the right time and realize a life of happiness and abundance. Send for new, FREE, SEALED BOOK that tells how you may receive these teachings. Address: Scribe L.Z.B.

THE ROSICRUCIANS
SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA

"Yep. She's queer. She knew just when Tom was killed, same way she did when her other son, Harry, was killed during the war. She saw a vision of Harry, him telling her he was dead. And later she found out it had happened that very hour, in Germany."

"Luck," Rod Carter said. But his voice sounded curiously anxious.

The bartender looked at him out of the evil side of his face. "Maybe," he said. "But Mrs. Bartlett's done it before, and she don't miss. Maybe they won't ever prove it, but Tom Bartlett died Monday afternoon about three o'clock. That's when Mrs. Bartlett saw the vision and sent Linda up here to look for Tom. To look for his body rather. She knew he was dead."

"Maybe she knows who helped him catch those trout," Carter said. "I think I'll go and see her."

It was night when he found the fisherman's cottage at Toleton. He parked his car in front of it, and then sat there, feeling silly and angry at himself for having come. He didn't put any faith in witch stories, he told himself. He wouldn't believe this old woman if she should claim to know who had been with Tom Bartlett that Monday afternoon. Besides he would be thrown out of court if he did believe her and tried to present that kind of evidence. He was angry at himself for having come here, half angry at himself for having become involved in the case. If Tom Bartlett had been murdered, it would be up to the sheriff to find the murderer. It wasn't a game warden's business. But his curiosity itched him and he thought once more of the dark welt across the back of Tom Bartlett's head, and he said half aloud, "The sheriff's a bum. He'll never prove anything."

Linda Bartlett opened the door when he knocked. It was dark on the porch, the light of the room dim behind her so that she stood outlined against it, her figure full-bodied and tall.

"What is it?"

"I want to see Mrs. Bartlett," Carter said.

"I'm Mrs. Bartlett."

Rod Carter didn't like women who were as tall as he was. Yet there was something about this woman that troubled him.

"It's your mother-in-law I want to see," he said.

"She isn't feeling well," the girl said slowly. She was looking at Carter, trying to remember where she had seen him before. After a moment she said, "You are the one who—found Tom?"

"Yes."

"Come in."

In the lighted room he saw that her face was still without makeup, but more composed than it had been that afternoon. The features were bold and strong, but with a strange, almost animal-like beauty.

"Wait a minute and I'll find out if Ma will see you," she said.

A few minutes later she was back. "In here," she said.

Carter went into a room so dimly lighted that at first he could see only vague outlines: walls, a bed pale in the gloom—and against his nostrils the odor of talcum powder and ancient female flesh. A voice said, "Get out, Linda. Leave him with me."

"All right, Ma." The door closed behind Carter.

"You found my boy," the thin, ancient voice said.

"Yes," Carter said.

"Who killed him?"

"I don't know."

"You are trying to find out."

He knew that she lay on the bed, but in the gloom he had not seen her. Now the first thing he saw was her eyes. They seemed to have no iris, like tiny white eggcups in the dim, gaunt outline of a face.

"I'm a game warden," Carter said. "I'm trying to learn who helped Tom Bartlett catch trout out of season."

The old woman made a cackling noise that might have been laughter, might have been derision.

"You want to know who killed him. And so do I."

He knew there was movement, but in that light he could not be sure. Then he saw she was beckoning to him with one claw-like finger, and he went closer, into the warm, stale odor of talcum powder and ancient flesh.

"Maybe I'll find out," the old woman said. "Maybe Tom will come back to tell me. If he does, I'll let you know."

"Ask him who helped with the fish," Carter said.

She gave no sign that she heard him. Her eyes were like bits of blank paper upon her face. After a moment Carter

said, almost against his will, "Tell me about this vision you saw, Mrs. Bartlett."

She might have been asleep, she might have been dead. Finally Carter turned to leave. Then the voice said behind him, "You've seen Linda. She isn't good for men. You leave her alone." There was nothing else, just the smell and the stillness of the room. Rod Carter found the door and went out.

IN THE small, cheaply furnished living room Linda Bartlett sat with a magazine in her lap, her hands folded on the book, making no pretense of reading. She did not move as Rod Carter crossed the room and spraddle-legged in front of her, but she watched him quietly. Her eyes were a pale, golden green he saw now.

"Tell me about this vision Mrs. Bartlett saw Monday afternoon," Rod Carter said.

"There isn't much to tell. I was ironing, about three that afternoon, when Ma called me. She said Harry—that was her other son, the one killed in the war—had just told her that Tom was dead. She told me to go to Balboa and find him."

"You went that afternoon?"

"I was there before dark. But I didn't find Tom until you—"

"Who had gone fishing with Tom that day?"

"Bill Singer."

"You're sure?"

"Tom fished with either Bill or Ed Graves. And he wasn't with Ed. I saw Ed soon after I got there."

"Who bought Tom Bartlett's fish?"

"Owen Powell. Or he did usually. I

[Turn page]

Now for EVERY WORKSHOP! NEW Invention Electroplates by BRUSH



Easy to Plate CHROMIUM
GOLD, SILVER, NICKEL, COPPER

... For Pleasure and Profit!

If you have a workshop—at home or in business—you need this new Warner Electroplate. At the stroke of an electrified brush, you can electroplate models and projects—you can replate worn articles, faucets, tools, fixtures, silverware, etc. with a durable, sparkling coat of metal... Gold, Silver, Chromium, Nickel, Copper or Cadmium. Method is easy, simple, quick. Everything furnished—equipment complete, ready for use. By doing a bit of work for others, your machine can pay for itself within a week. So make your shop complete by getting a Warner Electroplate right away. Send today for FREE SAMPLE and illustrated literature. ACT AT ONCE! Most Counties.

WARNER ELECTRIC CO., DEPT. W-33
1512 Jarvis Avenue, Chicago 26, Ill.

FREE Details & Sample!

WARNER ELECTRIC CO., 1512 Jarvis Avenue, Chicago 26, Dept. W-33
Gentlemen: Send Free Sample and Details to:

Name.....

Address.....

City.....

State.....

RUPTURE!

An amazing Air-Cushion Invention allows body freedom at work or play. Light, neat, cool, sanitary. Durable, cheap. Day and night protection helps Nature support was tensed muscles gently but surely. No risk. Sent on Trial! Write NOW for free Booklet and Proof of Results. All correspondence confidential.



Brooks Company, 382-N State St., Marshall, Mich.

MECHANICS • HOME STUDY

- Step up your own skill with facts & figures of your trade! Audels Mechanics Guides contain Practical Inside Trade Information in handy form. Fully illustrated. Easy to Understand. Highly Endorsed. (Book book you want for 7 days' Free Examination. Send no Money. Nothing to pay postman.)
- Sheet Metal \$1 • Welding \$1 • Refrigeration \$1
 - Plumbing \$0 • Masonry \$0 • Painting \$2 • Radio \$4
 - Electricity \$4 • Mathematics \$2 • Steam Engines \$4
 - Machines \$4 • Blueprint \$2 • Diesel \$2 • Drawing \$2
- If satisfied you pay only \$1 a month until price is paid.
- AUDEL, Publishers, 49 W. 23 St., New York 10, N. Y.

REAL WESTERN WALLET



Here's the rugged, genuine leather wallet, EL RANCHO, handstamped designed by a skilled craftsman of the west. Boots, saddles, lassos, guns, brands, and sundries are richly embossed on all sides of this two-piece brown wallet. Toss all around slide-away zipper, a collared photo-card holders and snap shut change purse. Also has identification card window, memo space and roomy bill pocket. A treasure gift for the season's low price of \$1.95. Order yours NOW!

ONLY \$1.95

"EL RANCHO"
Genuine Leather

SEND NO MONEY. Wallet will be rushed to you immediately. Pay postman only \$1.95 plus postage and 20% Fed. tax.

MAIL COUPON TODAY

RIO LEATHER PRODUCTS CO.
815 Court St., Newark 3, N. J.

Gentlemen:
Please send me ____ EL RANCHO wallets by return mail.

Name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....



NEW MIDGET ELECTRIC ARC WELDER

RETAILS ONLY \$3.95
FULLY GUARANTEED



Plugs Into Light Socket—AC or DC

It's new! It's handy! It's efficient! Use the Midget Electric Arc Welder for hundreds of light-metal jobs. Does comparable welder work with a 1/16 inch welding rod on thin metal as that of larger and higher priced welders. Operates on 15 amperes A.C. or D.C. current, by use of our special standard-coated 1/16 inch welding rods. Generous supply of rods supplied with machine. Recommended for all light welding like automobile fenders, etc. Take the Midget Arc anywhere to use. Sturdily built and fully guaranteed. Comes complete—ready to use. Nothing else to buy. No previous welding experience needed to strike an arc in a short time, give one mechanically inclined can learn to weld with this machine. You'll find hundreds of money-saving, time-saving uses for the Midget Arc around your home, garage, or workshop. Also in garages, factories, repair shops, tin shops, mechanics, farmers, inventors, etc. Order a Midget Electric Arc Welder now! **SEND NO MONEY.** We'll rush one to you, complete with rods and helmet equipped with APPROVED welding glass. Pay postman only \$3.95 plus postage charges. If not satisfied, return Midget Arc in 5 days from receipt and we'll refund your money immediately. **RUSH YOUR ORDER NOW!**

MIDGET ARC WELDER CO., Strader Ave., Dept. U-233, Cincinnati 26, Ohio

Learn Profitable Profession in 90 days at Home



MEN AND WOMEN, 18 TO 30—Many Swedish Massage graduates make \$50, \$75 or even more per week. Large full time incomes from doctors, hospitals, sanatoriums, clubs or private practice. Others make good money in spare time. You can win independence and prepare for future security by training at home and qualifying for Diploma, Anatomy Charts and 88-page Illustrated Book FREE—Bowl The College of Swedish Massage, Dept. 7623, 200 S. Ohio St., Chicago 11, Ill.

Fit-Rite makes False Teeth TIGHT

Makes loose dental plates fit snugly and comfortably. LASTS FOR MONTHS!



Simply squeeze on dental plate and put it in your mouth. Hardens and becomes part of plate. Money-back guarantee. Generous package of Dental Plates **FREE** CEMENT with each order. Send \$1.00 or bottled parcel post collect.

Fit-Rite Co., 1573 Milwaukee Ave., Dept. 8-62, Chicago, Ill.

BE A DETECTIVE

WORK HOME or TRAVEL. Experience unnecessary. DETECTIVE Particulars FREE. Write to GEO. R. H. WAGNER, 125 W. 86th St., N. Y.

STUDY AT HOME FOR PERSONAL SUCCESS and LARGE EARNINGS. 35 years expert instruction—over 108,000 students enrolled. LL.B. Degree awarded. All texts furnished. Easy payments. Send for FREE BOOK.

AMERICAN EXTENSION SCHOOL OF LAW
Dept. 78-T, 646 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill.

DO YOU WANT TO STOP TOBACCO?



Banish the craving for tobacco as thousands have with Tobacco Dependence. Write for free booklet telling of mysterious effect of tobacco and of a treatment which has relieved many men. Caution! Use only as directed.

30 Years in Business
THE NEWELL COMPANY
153 Clayton, Sta., St. Louis 5, Mo.

FREE BOOK

don't know where he planned to sell those trout."

"Was Owen around when you got to Balboa that afternoon?"

She looked at him out of the pale green eyes, her hands motionless in her lap.

"I don't know," she said at last. "He wasn't in his fish-house."

"Thanks," Rod Carter said.

He went out and got in his car. As he was turning around he saw the door of the house open and Linda Bartlett came out. She waved and he stopped the car and waited.

She came and put her hands on the door of the car.

"Ma sent you a message," she said.

"Yes?"

"She says you forget about Tom. She says it is better to forget about him than for something to happen to you. And she says it will happen if you keep on—something bad."

"Tell your Ma thanks," Carter said.

He drove off. It was quiet on the street. The heat pushed down hot and breathless against him. And yet the sweat on his hands was cold and in his throat was a cold lump as though he had swallowed a small piece of ice.

He rubbed his hand against his throat. "A lot of silly baloney," he muttered. "I don't know why I went there."

It was the next day when the sheriff told Curious Carter, "It wasn't murder, Curious. We are sure of that now."

"Yeah," Carter said. "What was it?"

"An accident. Bartlett was alone and fell and hit his head on the engine. But it wasn't that which killed him. The coroner says he died of carbon monoxide poison. You told us he was lying face down, his face just beside the engine exhaust. The boat kept running while he lay there unconscious and that's what killed him."

"And you think he hauled those nets alone?"

"It's possible, isn't it?"

"Possible. Have you found Bill Singer?"

"He's on a several days' fishing trip at the grouper banks. I'll talk to him when he comes back. But his wife swears he didn't go anywhere with Bartlett on Monday."

"Okay," Carter said. "She wasn't so sure when she talked to me."

So that was the end of it, Rod Carter told himself. The sheriff said it was an accident. The sheriff said Bartlett had been alone. That finished it, even from a game warden's angle. It was wrapped and tied and ready to be put away in the files. So he should forget about it.

But he didn't forget. He thought of the old woman, and of Linda with the cat-green eyes, and of Owen Powell, and of Bill Singer who couldn't be found, and of Ed Graves.

And finally his curiosity got the better of him. He wrote two letters, typing them on plain white paper, and dropped them into the post office.

It was very dark on the dock. The bulk of the fish-house at the dock's end barely showed against the sky. The soft lapping of waves against the pilings was louder than any noise Rod Carter made in his rubber-soled shoes. He told himself that it wasn't curiosity that brought him here; it wasn't that he was trying to prove the sheriff wrong. He told himself that it was because he still believed someone had helped Tom Bartlett haul those trout nets and it was his duty as a game warden to learn who that person was.

He reached the fish-house and went out the narrow walk that circled it. There was an open window on the bayside with light coming out from it. Quietly, carefully, he went to the window.

Owen Powell sat at a desk inside, his dark, hawklike profile toward the window. On his desk there was a bottle of whisky, two glasses, a pitcher of water. While Carter watched, the big man poured whisky into one of the glasses, drank it straight. He was reaching for the water pitcher when there was a knock on the door.

Owen Powell never touched the pitcher. He bent swiftly, pulled open a drawer in the desk and took out a pistol. He flipped open the cylinder, gave it a single turn, clicked it back into place. Then he put the pistol in his desk drawer and leaving it open called, "Come in."

The man who entered was short and fat. Wind and sun had burned his skin almost black and bleached his hair colorless. Just inside the door he stopped. The tip of his tongue licked at his lips.

"Come in, Bill," Owen Powell said.

Outside the window Carter began to

[Turn page]

GET INTO RADIO TELEVISION ELECTRONICS NOW!



INTERESTING JOBS - GOOD PAY - EARN WHILE YOU LEARN - A BUSINESS OF YOUR OWN. Here's a few of the opportunities awaiting you as a Trained National Radio, Television and Electronic Expert. Broadcasting, Radio Service, and other specialized phases are constantly demanding more and more trained men. Get all the facts about this GREAT FIELD. ACT AT ONCE!

SHOP METHOD HOME TRAINING
By a Real Established Resident Trade School With Classrooms, FM Studios, Shops and Laboratories gives you the knowledge, skill, and experience that assure definite progress—step-by-step for a brighter, more prosperous future. You Learn by Doing. Build a standard LONG DISTANCE SUPERHETERODYNE RECEIVER as shown above, an audio oscillator, a signal generator (low powered Radio transmitter) and many other units and experiments with equipment furnished you in your home. National Graduates everywhere have qualified, through spare time study, for well-paying jobs, success and security in Radio. It is a field with a proved future. Find out what this industry offers National Trained Service Engineers, Operators and Technicians. Take the first step to greater success NOW by sending coupon below—TODAY!

NATIONAL SCHOOLS
LOS ANGELES 37, CALIFORNIA

MAIL COUPON

National Schools, Dept. 5-TQ
4000 S. Figueroa, Los Angeles 37, Calif.

Mail me sample lesson and book FREE. Paste on a postcard

NAME.....AGE.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY.....ZONE.....STATE.....

If Ruptured! Try This Out

Modern Protection Provides Great Comfort and Holding Security Without Torturous Truss Wearing

An "eye-opening" revelation in sensible and comfortable reasonable rupture protection may be yours for the asking, without cost or obligation. Simply send name and address to William S. Rice, Inc., Dept. 1-B, Adams, N. Y., and full details of the new and different Rice Method will be sent you Free. Without hard flesh-gauging pads or tormenting pressure, here's a Support that has brought joy and comfort to thousands—by releasing them from Trusses with springs and straps that bind and cut. Designed to securely hold a rupture up and in where it belongs and yet give freedom of body and genuine comfort. For full information—write today!



BE A Nurse

MAKE \$30-\$40 A WEEK

You can learn practical nursing at home in spare time. Course endorsed by physicians. Thousands of graduates. 48th yr. One graduate has charge of 10-bed hospital. Another served \$400 while learning. Equipment included. Men, women 18 to 60. High School not required. Every tuition payment. Trial plan. Write today.

CHICAGO SCHOOL OF NURSING
Dept. 424, 100 East Ohio Street, Chicago 11, Ill.
Please send free booklet and 16 sample lesson pages.
Name.....
City.....State.....Age.....



VETERANS!... HONORABLE DISCHARGE RING

HERE'S A VALUE! Handsome, hefty Genuine Sterling Silver HONORABLE DISCHARGE RING yellow gold finish, for only \$1.98 plus tax. Beautiful Discharge Emblem on handsome scrolled mounting. A magnificent ring you'll wear for life.

SEND NO MONEY Mail your name, address, and ring size today. Your Genuine Sterling Gold Finish DISCHARGE RING will be sent to you AT ONCE. Pay your postman only \$1.98 plus tax and postage. Wear the ring 10 days, if not delighted, return it and your money will be refunded at once. Yes, your satisfaction guaranteed! **ORDER TODAY.** Send strip of paper for size. Charles Stewart, 616 Walnut St., Dept. L-205, Cincinnati 2, O.

What Every Mason Wants



We have important Masonic books for Blue Lodges, Chapter, Commandery, Scottish Rite, and Shrine. **OUR RITUALS ARE USED THE WORLD OVER** Send for free catalog of books and rituals for Masons, Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias, Knights of Columbus, etc. **EZRA A. COOK, Publisher, P. O. 796, GMY, Chicago 90, Ill.**

ASTHMA

W. K. STERLINE, 830 Ohio Ave., Sidney, Ohio

Symptoms Relieved. Write today for free information and special money back offer.

LAW

STUDY AT HOME FOR PERSONAL SUCCESS AND LARGER EARNINGS. 38 years expert instruction—over 108,000 students enrolled. LL.B. Degree awarded. All texts furnished. Easy payments. Send for **FREE BOOK.** **AMERICAN EXTENSION SCHOOL OF LAW** Dept. 75-1, 646 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill.



GOOD MONEY FOR YOUR SPARE TIME.

Be our Dealer in your locality for **STOCK, UNION, MAKE WORK AND SPORT GARMENTS.** No experience necessary. Easy work. **ORDER** or buy work uniforms. We supply everything needed. Write immediately for **FREE** Quota. **ROBT. STRONG GARMENT CO., 310-327 W. Van Buren St., Dept. K-3, Chicago, Ill.**

RUPTURED?

Get Relief This Proven Way

Why try to worry along with trusses that gouge your flesh—press heavily on hips and spine—enlarge openings—fail to hold rupture? You need the Cluthe. No leg-straps or cutting belts. Automatic adjustable pad holds at real opening—follows every body movement with instant increased support in case of strain. Cannot slip whether at work or play. Light. Waterproof. Can be worn in bath. Send for amazing **FREE** book, "Advice to Ruptured," and details of liberal truthful 60-day trial offer. Also endorsements from grateful users in your neighborhood. Write:

Cluthe Sons, Dept. 33, Bloomfield, New Jersey

smile. His letter had worked: Bill Singer was here—not on any extended fishing trip.

Singer had closed the door behind him, moved over to stand beside Owen Powell's desk.

"Well?" he said.

Powell sat with his right hand on the desk but the drawer which held the pistol was only a few inches below it.

"So you want to talk," he said. "Have a drink."

"I don't want anything to drink." Singer's face, beneath its dark burn, was yellow with fright. "And I don't know anything about what happened to Tom Bartlett."

"No?" Powell said.

"I had been fishing with him that day, sure. But he dropped me at the point about sundown. He was going on down to Dark Bayou to meet you."

"Meet me?" Powell's hand came over closer to the desk edge.

"He said he was meeting you. He said you were going to buy the trout off him—that you'd be there with your fish truck."

"So you think I killed him?"

"I didn't say that! I—"

Rod Carter heard the faint tap of leather on planking. He ducked, spinning away from the window into darkness, flattening himself against the wall of the fish-house. He had been looking into the light and now for a moment he could see nothing. Nor was there any other sound.

Then he saw the shadow move—a lump of darkness against the dark night. Someone had come around the far corner of the fish-house and was moving toward the lighted window. Whoever it was moved quietly, keeping low against the wall.

The person was near the window now, looking cautiously into it. And the light from the window touched on the pale, sensuously beautiful face of Linda Bartlett.

IT SEEMED to Rod Carter that time stood still, that it dragged on and on. He wanted to know what was happening in that room, but the window was the only place which offered a view. What was happening inside that room might tell him all he needed to know, and he couldn't see!

The girl moved. There was a quick gleam of light. Then he saw her face with the lips pulled back so that the teeth shone like the teeth of a snarling dog. Her nostrils were flared, her eyes crazy. She raised the gun in her hand to the window's edge.

Rod Carter drove straight at her. He knew then he could not make it and he shouted and she spun toward him, the gun crashing, a tiny dagger of flame stabbing at his face. Then he was clutching at the gun and the two of them were swaying, stumbling backward. The gun crashed again, the bullet ripping into the fish-house.

Carter felt the thin rail of the dock against his back. The girl was slashing at him with her free hand, screaming, cursing, trying to twist the gun to bear on him. She lunged against him, and he felt the rail sway outward. There was the thin cry of nails tearing free. Then, still holding to the girl, he was falling back through darkness into the bay. . . .

"So that's the way it was," Rod Carter told the sheriff. "Bartlett wasn't dead when his mother saw that vision. There wasn't anything wrong with him at all."

"Then what kind of vision was it?"

"The same kind she generally had," Carter said, "only people don't remember the ones that are false. If an old lady has a reputation of being a fortune teller and she predicts a hundred things and one of them turns out true, everybody remembers that one and forgets the rest. But if you remind them of it they may remember the others."

"It seems she was always predicting things. She said Ed Graves would be killed in a barroom brawl, and he's still alive. But the one about her son Harry in the war was right. Things like that happen occasionally."

"I've heard of them," the sheriff said. "I wonder how it is."

"How should I know? Anyway, Tom wasn't dead when Linda got to Balboa. But she knew where he usually met Owen Powell when he was selling him fish out of season. She went there because she wanted to see Powell—he was the guy she had a fire for at the time. Powell wasn't at Dark Bayou either. Then Tom Bartlett arrived and she and Tom argued. Tom accused her of having an affair with Powell. So she knocked Tom over the head with a wrench.

[Turn page]



ALSO BOOKS ON APPROVAL



SEND NO MONEY. Just mail the coupon for a complete set of Six Big Auto Books, 10th Edition. Whether you are a mechanic or helper, expert or apprentice, auto owner or driver, take immediate advantage of this FREE EXAMINATION OFFER.

MAKE GOOD MONEY NOW HOLD A PERMANENT JOB

America wants its automobiles kept in good repair. Men with "know how" are in demand, at big pay. These books will help you set and hold an important job, or give you a chance to go into business for yourself now or later. Any man who has tried to improve himself can learn auto servicing and repairing by this quick reference method. Use the JIFFY INDEX to find easily understood answer to any auto problem. These wonder books prepared by eleven of America's great automobile engineers. Many hundreds of valuable illustrations. Send the coupon TODAY.

[A year's consulting privileges with our engineers now given with these books without extra charge.]

Vocational Publishers Since 1896

CAN YOU FIX IT?

These wonder books tell step by step HOW to maintain efficient running and adjustments, how to keep a car at maximum efficiency, including latest improvements in car design and operation. Engine troubles and how to correct them well covered.

6 BIG VOLUMES
2800 pages, 2000 illustrations, wiring diagrams, etc., including diesel engines. Beautiful modernistic, washable cloth binding.

AMERICAN TECHNICAL SOCIETY, Dept. A848

3801 Ave. of 58th St., Chicago 37, Ill.
I would like to examine your Six-Volume Set of Auto Books. I will pay the delivery charges only, but if I choose I will return them express collect. If after 10 days I prefer to keep them, I will send you \$2 and pay the balance at the rate of only \$3 a month until \$24.00 has been paid. Please include consulting service as offered above.

Name
Address
City State
Please enclose letter stating occupation, employer's name and address, and name and address of at least one business man as reference. Men in service, also please give home address.

ACCOUNTANT BECOME AN EXPERT ACCOUNTANT

Executive Accountants and C. P. A.'s earn \$2,000 to \$10,000 a year. Thousands of firms need them. We train you thoroughly at home in spare time for C. P. A. examinations of executive accounting principles. Previous experience unnecessary. Personal training under supervision of staff of C. P. A.'s. Placement central and help. Write for free book, "Accountancy, the Profession that Pays." G. I. APPROVED.
LASALLE Extension University, 417 So. Dearborn St.
A Correspondence Institution Dept. 5329-H, Chicago 5, Ill.

OLD LEG TROUBLE

Easy to use Viscose Home Method. Heals many old leg sores caused by leg congestion, various venous swollen legs and injuries or no cost for trial if it fails to show results in 10 days. Describe your trouble and receive FREE BOOK.
T. G. VISCOSE COMPANY
140 N. Dearborn Street, Chicago 2, Illinois

LATEST TRY EYE-GLASSES BY MAIL NOW

SEND NO MONEY

TEST YOUR OWN SIGHT at Home with our New Patented Sight Testers. **GLASSES** NEW

16 DAYS' TRIAL OFFER As Low As **MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE** **LOW PRICES**

FREE If you're not 100% satisfied with glasses we make we will refund every cent you pay us. Shipping at CRYSTAL-OD and scientific test chart. Mr. Service
U. S. EYE-GLASSES CO. 1567 MILWAUKEE AVE.,
DEPT. 8-82, CHICAGO, ILL.

AUTHENTIC WESTERN
SADDLE RING
 FOR MEN! & WOMEN!
Only \$4.95
Pure Sterling Silver
Postpaid We Pay Tax
 First time at anywhere near this low price! Authentic replica of romantic western saddle. Hand-somely formed from solid Sterling Silver by Navajo Indian craftsmen. Massive style for men, dainty style for women. A gift of distinction. A pleasure to wear. Sent on approval.
SEND NO MONEY! Just clip this ad and mail with your name and address. Pay postman only \$4.95 plus few cents postage on arrival; or send cash and we pay postage. Wear this sensational ring for 10 days. If not delighted, return for full refund. **ORDER NOW! Use COUPON BELOW!**

10 DAY TRIAL ORDER COUPON
 ARIZONA CRAFTSMEN ROOM 608
 1904 FARMER ST. OMAHA 2, NEBRASKA
 SEND Sterling Saddle Ring as I have indicated below.
☐ C.O.D. ☐ Cash Enclosed ☐ Send Postpaid
 NAME _____
 ADDRESS _____
 CITY _____ STATE _____
☐ Men's ☐ Women's Ring Size _____

USED Correspondence Courses
 Complete HOME-STUDY COURSES and self-instruction textbooks, slightly used, bound, and exchanged. All subjects, 100% satisfaction. Cash paid for used courses. Full details & 100-page illustrated bargain catalog Free.
 Write Nelson Co., 1139 S. Wabash Ave., Dept. 66, Chicago 6, Ill.

FREE ENLARGEMENT
 of your Favorite Photo
FROM FAMOUS HOLLYWOOD FILM STUDIOS
 Just to get acquainted we will make a beautiful 5x7 enlargement of any picture or negative. Be sure to include color of hair, eyes and clothing and get our bargain offer for having your enlargement beautifully hand colored in oil and mounted in your choice of handsome frames. Limit 2 to a customer. Please enclose 10c to cover cost of handling and mailing each enlargement. Your original picture or negative will be returned with the FREE 5x7 enlargement postpaid. Act now! Offer limited to U.S.A.
HOLLYWOOD FILM STUDIOS
 7021 Santa Monica Blvd., Dept. 270, Hollywood, Calif.

FOR ITCHING, BURNING, IRRITATION OF ECZEMA PSORIASIS
Athlete's Foot
Amazing Wonder Cream—14 DAYS FREE TRIAL
 Do tiny water blisters form? Do dry scaly patches form? Does skin crack, thicken, peel, or swell? Does itching, burning, redness become intense?
SEND NO MONEY—UNLESS 100% SATISFIED
MAIL COUPON TODAY
WILEY PRODUCTS—Dept. Y-8-6
 4300 Drexel Blvd., Chicago 15, Ill.
 Send postpaid full size jar Wiley's Wonderful Skin Cream for 14 days Free Trial. Will use it faithfully. If not satisfied will notify you within 20 days after receiving jar; otherwise will keep jar and pay for it.
 NAME _____ AGE _____
 ADDRESS _____
 CITY _____ STATE _____

"She thought he was dead and didn't know what to do with him. She didn't want to throw him in the water since he might not be found—and he carried insurance and she wanted it. So she started the engine on his boat and headed it out to open water. That way he was almost certain to be found within a day or two; there is too much fishing in these waters for a boat not to be found. But after a day or two nobody could tell the exact time of his death and folks would naturally believe he'd died at the time his mother saw the vision—while Linda was still in Toleton."

"Bill Singer knew Tom hadn't died at that time. Why didn't he tell us all about it?"

"He was afraid. He thought he would be accused of the murder. And he knew for sure I'd get him fined for catching trout."

"And Owen Powell?"
 "He saw Linda leaving Dark Bayou. Later, when Tom's body was found, he had a good idea what had happened. But he was pretty much in love with Linda, too."

"Why did she try to kill him there at the dock?"

"Something she heard him tell Bill Singer. Singer said I would keep after them until I found what had happened and Powell said if things got close he would tell what he knew. From the things she said I think she was as angry at the idea he'd turn her in as she was at the risk of being caught. It seems she had a violent temper where her affections were concerned."

"How did you get Singer to come out of hiding and meet Powell? How'd you find him?"

"I wrote him a letter. It was a pretty good bet his wife knew where he was. I signed Powell's name to it and said it was important we talk over what had happened to Bartlett. I put in a threat of what might happen if he didn't show up. Then I wrote Powell the same kind of note, and signed Bill Singer's name. Then I wrote Linda Bartlett to come. But she was supposed to get there later, after Singer had gone. She showed up too soon."

"Well, it worked," the sheriff said grudgingly. "But I still don't see what you really expected to learn from listen-

Read POPULAR DETECTIVE Every Issue!

ing to them talk."

"Why I expected to learn what they knew," Carter said. "They wouldn't tell me. So that was the only way to satisfy my curiosity."

He went out into the hot, still night. It was too hot to sleep well and he knew he wouldn't sleep anyway. He'd keep on wondering about old Mrs. Bartlett and those visions she had. He had read of people who sometimes knew, by some supernatural power it seemed, of things before they even happened.

A psychologist would probably say that Mrs. Bartlett had known the evil in her daughter-in-law, had known, perhaps unconsciously, that she was capable of murder, and this had preyed on her mind and caused the vision, which was only a dream really. Or it was possible that Linda had talked of Tom's death and planted the idea in the old woman's mind.

There were dozens of explanations and none of them could ever be proved. Curious Carter knew that he would not sleep well for nights. He'd keep puzzling about this—and he would never be certain.

Plenty to SEE from Cover to Cover



ENTERTAINING, UP-TO-THE-MINUTE
PHOTO FEATURES ON EVERY PAGE!

NOW ON SALE—10c AT ALL STANDS



DRAW for MONEY!

Be An ARTIST!

PREPARE TODAY FOR THE FUTURE THAT LIES AHEAD

Trained Artists Are Capable of Earning \$50, \$60, \$75 A WEEK

Use your spare time to prepare for a profitable Art Career! Start training at home, now!

It's pleasant and interesting to study Art the W. H. A. way. **COMMERCIAL ART, DESIGNING, CARTOONING**—all in one complete course. No previous Art experience necessary—we teach you step-by-step by our practical home study method well known since 1914. Write today for information in **FREE BOOK, "ART FOR PLEASURE AND PROFIT"**—tells all about our course, material furnished, instruction service and commercial opportunities for you in art. **STAYS AGE.**

Course Approved Under G. I. Bill
WASHINGTON SCHOOL OF ART
Studio 653H, 1125 15th St. N.W., Wash. D.C.

High School Course at Home Many Finish in 2 Years

Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to residents school work—prepares for college entrance exams. Standard H.S. texts supplied. Diploma awarded. High school education already completed. Single subjects if desired and highly try and socially. Don't be handicapped all your life by a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.

American School, Dept. H-888, Desmet at 86th, Chicago 37

LAW...

STUDY AT HOME Legally trained men with higher positions and public life. Greater opportunities now than ever before.

More Ability: More Prestige: More Money pay by plan. You can train at home during spare time. Degree of Law, Bachelor of text material, including 16-volume Law Library, low cost, easy terms. Get our valuable degree. Start your training now. Free "Evidence" books FREE. Send NOW. G. I. APPROVED.
LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY, 417 South Dearborn Street
A Correspondence Institution Dept. 5326-L, Chicago 5, Ill.

INVENTORS

Detailed information on how to secure patent protection for your invention will be mailed promptly upon request.

Victor J. Evans & Co., Meritt H. Evans, Registered Patent Attorney,
297-E Meritt Bldg., Washington 6, D. C.

STAMMER?

This new 128-page book, "Stammering, Its Cause and Correction," describes the Bogue Unit Method for scientific correction of stammering and stuttering—successful for 46 years. Free—no obligation.

Benjamin N. Bogue, Dept. 4278, Circle Tower, Indianapolis 4, Ind.

CONFIDENTIAL LOAN SERVICE

Borrow \$50 to \$300"

Need money? No matter where

you live you can borrow BY

MAIL \$50.00 to \$300.00 this

easy quick confidential way.

BY MAIL

IT IS EASY TO BORROW BY MAIL

Completely confidential and private
CONVENIENT MONTHLY PAYMENTS

NO ENDORSERS NEEDED
EMPLOYED MEN and women of good character can solve their money problems quickly and in privacy with loans **MADE BY MAIL**. No endorsers or co-signers. We do not contact employers, friends or relatives. Convenient monthly payments. Send us your name and address and we will mail you a plain blank and complete details FREE in plain envelope. There is no obligation.

STATE FINANCE CO.

303 Marine Bldg. • Dept. J-52 • New Orleans 12, La.

GENUINE MILITARY WRIST WATCH

Complete with New Style
EXPANSION BAND



ONLY \$13.95
Sensational value! Genuine Military wrist watch, precision built, split-second time-keeper, for ONLY \$13.95 plus tax! Water-protected, shock absorber. Radium dial and hands, easily read in the dark, unbreakable crystal, red sweep second hand. Handsome, non-corrosive stainless steel case. Genuine non-corrosive stainless steel expansion bracelet fits all wrists. Order yours today!
SEND NO MONEY! Rush order now. Pay postman only \$13.95 plus postage and 10% Fed. tax. If not delighted, return within 10 days for refund.
CORONA WATCH SALES COMPANY
809 W. Madison St., Dept. C-14, Chicago 7, Ill.

DETECTIVES

TRAINING—SECRET INVESTIGATIONS—FINGER PRINTS
New Method—Short Time, Home—Travel—Secret Code-Booklet
FREE—WHITE, INTERNATIONAL DETECTIVE SYSTEM, 1701-T
Monroe St., N. E., Washington, D. C. 25.

ONE IN A MILLION



YOU can be one in a million—one of a million handpicked men—by joining the new Regular Army. The Army offers security, the highest pay in military history, extra pay for overseas service and special duties, and a real chance for advancement. Food, clothing, lodging and medical care are free. You can retire after 20 years on half pay, after 30 years on three-quarters pay. There are great opportunities for education; technical training; travel, and generous vacations. Enlist for 1½, 2 or 3 years (3-year men choose service and theatre where open). See your local recruiting officer—today!

KITTY TAKEN FOR A RIDE

(Concluded from page 98)

went to off to keep his theatre date with an unsuspecting girl.

Blixt drove mechanically, his mind and body sick with fear. Kitty asked him if Harry was out "buying some green goods," which seems like a reference to counterfeit money, but Blixt muttered that he didn't know.

"She kept looking for Harry," Blixt testified, "and sticking her head out, and I kept thinking how could I do this, or if I should get out of the buggy and run away, and then I thought of my wife and how he would kill her if I did, sure, and that is why I stayed in the buggy. At last I got too far and she stuck her head out like this—and I raised my revolver and shot, and I never looked where I shot or nothing."

With the murder done, Blixt yielded at last to panic. He turned the mare and started back to town at a gallop. The dead body bouncing limply, terrified him and he wanted feverishly to get it away from him. He took Kitty's feet and shoved her out.

Back in town, Blixt stopped the buggy, got out, tied the reins around the whip handle and sent the mare home. He took a streetcar and got back to the Ozark Flats where he disposed of the cartridges and the gun as instructed.

The trial lasted seven weeks and Hayward's goose was cooked from the start. His family poured all their resources into the defense, but spent their money in vain. Harry Hayward was found guilty and hanged on December 11, 1895. Everybody agreed that hanging was too good for him.

Claus Blixt was sentenced to a short term in prison, which he served without attracting notice, and was released. He was luckier than most weaklings who let themselves be talked into doing someone else's dirty work.

EXCITING TRUE PICTURE-STORIES OF
WORLD-FAMOUS HEROES IN

REAL LIFE COMICS

NOW ON SALE—10c AT ALL STANDS!

OFFICIAL BUSINESS

(Concluded from page 9)

kind enough to send us. They help us mightily in planning future issues of this magazine!

Mostly boosts this time, folks—that's how they came in. Even the gentleman who has a gripe, has only a slight one. So we'll put our worst foot forward and let 'er rip:

I like your stories on the whole. They are mostly gripping and help to while away many weary hours. Can't say as much for your illustrations, however, although they are better than they were. I like those fancy initials with the pictures that you have heading your chapters. Maybe you think your readers don't notice such things; but I can assure you they do.

I have quite a few of the old so-called "dime novels" which have now become collector's items. The decor of modern magazines such as yours has certainly improved. At the same time, I think guns are too big, heroes are too handsome, heroines too beautiful, villains too ugly and there is too much bang—bang—bang in your illustrations, if you get what I mean.—FRANCY K. TRENT, CHICAGO, ILL.

Your point is interesting, Mr. Trent, and we'd like to know whether other readers share your opinion. How about writing us, everybody?

Here's another letter from the neighborhood of the Windy City:

I read a lot of detective and mystery stories; but above all, your **POPULAR DETECTIVE** is tops with me, no pun intended. I am sure glad to welcome our new scrappy hero, **Chet Lacey**. Hope he keeps riding along with us to take his place alongside **Rolph Burnham**, **Moody Hackett** and other outstanding heroes we have had in the past. Keep up the good work.—FRANCIS X. GALLAGHER, GARY, IND.

Thanks, Francis, your letter hits the nail right on the head—no pun intended either. We, too, think **Robert Sidney Bowen** has created a character to be reckoned with.

Here's another boost, this time from a lady:

As a busy housewife with three children to look after, I certainly enjoy the few minutes of relaxation every day that I can spare for the splendid stories in **POPULAR DETECTIVE** magazine. Don't let me down.—MRS. JENNY BLAKE, SIOUX CITY, IOWA.

We'll try not to, Mrs. Blake! And that goes for all of the many other readers who have written us. Keep those letters rolling in! A postcard will do as well as a sealed letter. Whether you carry a hammer or blow a horn, word from our readers is always more than welcome and though we can quote from only a few typical missives here, we read and enjoy them all. Please send all letters and cards to The Editor, **POPULAR DETECTIVE**, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N.Y.

Happy reading to you all, and many thanks!
—THE EDITOR.

HOME-STUDY BRINGS BIGGER PAY

Don't be caught napping when Opportunity knocks. Prepare for advancement and more money by training now for the job ahead. **Free 48-Page Booklets Tell How.** Write for the book on the business field you like—or mail us this ad with your name and address in the margin. Now, please.

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Higher Accountancy | ☐ Business Management |
| ☐ Traffic Management | ☐ Salesmanship |
| ☐ Law—Degree of LL.B. | ☐ Expert Bookkeeping |
| ☐ Commercial Law | ☐ C. P. A. Coaching |
| ☐ Stenotypy (Machine Shorthand) | |

G. I. APPROVED

LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY

A Correspondence Institution

Dept. 5329-R 417 So. Dearborn St. Chicago 5



TOOTHACHE? DUE TO CAVITY

GET QUICK AMAZING RELIEF by placing Dent's Tooth Gum—or Droya—in cavity of aching tooth. Cavity toothache, frequently strikes when you can't see dentist. Be prepared! Ask your druggist for either complete aid package, follow directions.

**DENT'S TOOTH GUM
TOOTH DROPS**



RHEUMATISM

ARTHRITIS-NEURITIS-SCIATICA

If you suffer the agonizing pains of these diseases when the usual remedies have failed, learn about a new trustworthy, modern, non-surgical treatment method. This marvelous treatment is completely explained in the **Bell Clinic's FREE Book**. Write today. No obligation. **BELL CLINIC** Dept. 504 Excelsior Springs, Mo.

HORSE MASTERY!

A FINE HOBBY — A GREAT VOCATION!

"The EXPERT HORSEMAN"



FREE BOOK—Tells how you can learn to: BREAK COLTS, GAIT SHOW HORSES, TRAIN HORSES, STOCK AND RACE HORSES, BREAK BAD HABITS, HANDLE ANY HORSE, TRAIN CIRCUS TRICK HORSES. WRITE TODAY!

ANIMAL LOVERS ASSOCIATION
BOX 74-157 TARKANA, CALIFORNIA

SUBSCRIBE
TODAY
50¢
One Year

This Easy Way TEACHES GUITAR to Your Satisfaction in 30 Days Or Money Back



Astounding new **Jim Major Home Method** teaches you to play guitar easily, quickly, without long hours practicing scales or exercises. No musical knowledge necessary. Play many popular songs, hymns in very short time. 30 lessons, complete course for only \$1.69. EXTRA — **BIG 53 SONG BOOK** included without additional cost. Send no money... pay postman \$1.69 plus postage. (Cash with order we pay postage.) Money back guarantee. Send today to **Jim Major, Room 15-E, 230 East Ohio, Chicago 11, Ill.**

Thunder rides the skies

When hot-headed, handsome Lewt McCandles gallaps recklessly along a trail that can lead only to flaming gunplay, a million-acre cattle empire trembles in the balance. Brother wars on brather in an action-packed, swift-shooting story of the great American Southwest in its sprawling, brawling infancy.



Don't miss DUEL IN THE SUN

smash success of current western novels, complete and unabridged (originally a \$2.50 best seller), now available in a glossy POPULAR LIBRARY edition for 25c. Get DUEL IN THE SUN today.

*A Best Seller
at \$2.50*

now, Popular Library Edition

only **25¢**

**AT ALL
NEWSSTANDS
NOW!**

**POPULAR
LIBRARY**

Books of Proven Merit



Starred in \$6,000,000 Technicolor Production

JENNIFER JONES
GREGORY PECK
JOSEPH COTTEN

what I.C.S. means to

YOU



CAN you remember when there wasn't an I. C. S.? Not unless you're well over 55 years of age—for that is how long these world-famous schools have been making Training for Success readily available to all.

Before I. C. S., multitudes of potentially able men and women had no place to turn for the knowledge they needed in mastering rewarding careers. Today there's no excuse for any one anywhere to struggle under the handicap imposed by lack of training.

If you are one of the many without time or opportunity to attend traditional schools . . . if it's necessary for you to do your *learning* while you're *earning* . . . I. C. S. is especially designed for you. Whatever your interest, you'll find it covered by one of the 400 I. C. S.

Courses in technical and business subjects. However you're situated, this training can be yours.

The records of thousands of successful students demonstrate that today's I. C. S. student is tomorrow's leader. The same Opportunity they seized is at your door right now. That's what I. C. S. means to you . . . if you are alert, forward-looking, determined to get ahead. You can prove your alertness by mailing the coupon right now.

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS



BOX 3970-M, SCRANTON 9, PENNA.

Without cost or obligation, please send me full particulars about the course *before* which I have marked X:

- | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| ☐ Air Conditioning and Heating | ☐ Structural Engineering | ☐ Industrial Engineering | ☐ Textile Courses |
| ☐ Refrigeration | ☐ Surveying and Mapping | ☐ Machine Shop | ☐ Cotton Manufacturing |
| ☐ Steam Fitting | ☐ Communications Courses | ☐ Mechanical Drafting | ☐ Rayon Weaving |
| ☐ Chemistry Courses | ☐ Electronics | ☐ Mechanical Engineering | ☐ Textile Designing |
| ☐ Chemical Engineering | ☐ Radio, General | ☐ Mold-Left Work | ☐ Woollen Manufacturing |
| ☐ Chemistry, Analytical | ☐ Radio Operating | ☐ Patternmaking—Wood, Metal | ☐ Business and Academic Courses |
| ☐ Chemistry, Industrial | ☐ Radio Servicing | ☐ Reading Shop Blueprints | ☐ Accounting |
| ☐ Chemistry, Mfg. Iron & Steel | ☐ Telegraph Engineering | ☐ Sheet-Metal Drafting | ☐ Advertising |
| ☐ Petroleum Refining | ☐ Electrical Courses | ☐ Sheet-Metal Worker | ☐ Bookkeeping |
| ☐ Plastics | ☐ Electrical Drafting | ☐ Ship Drafting | ☐ Business Correspondence |
| ☐ Pulp and Paper Making | ☐ Electrical Engineering | ☐ Ship Fitting | ☐ Business Management |
| ☐ Civil Engineering, Architectural and Mining Courses | ☐ Electric Light and Power | ☐ Tool Designing | ☐ Certified Public Accounting |
| ☐ Architectural Drafting | ☐ Lighting Technician | ☐ Toolmaking | ☐ Commercial |
| ☐ Architecture | ☐ Practical Electrician | ☐ Welding—Gas and Electric | ☐ Cost Accounting |
| ☐ Bridge and Building Foreman | ☐ Internal Combustion Engines Courses | ☐ Railroad Courses | ☐ Federal Tax |
| ☐ Building Estimating | ☐ Auto Technicians | ☐ Air Brakes | ☐ First Year College |
| ☐ Civil Engineering | ☐ Diesel Engines | ☐ Diesel Locomotive | ☐ French |
| ☐ Coal Mining | ☐ Diesel-Electric | ☐ Locomotive Engineer | ☐ Good English |
| ☐ Contracting and Building | ☐ Gas Engines | ☐ Locomotive Fireman | ☐ High School |
| ☐ Highway Engineering | ☐ Mechanical Courses | ☐ Railroad Section Foreman | ☐ Higher Mathematics |
| ☐ Lumber Dealer | ☐ Aeronautical Engineering | ☐ Steam Engineering Courses | ☐ Illustrating |
| ☐ Reading Structural Blueprints | ☐ Aircraft Drafting | ☐ Boilermaking | ☐ Motor Traffic |
| ☐ Sanitary Engineering | ☐ Flight Engineer | ☐ Combustion Engineering | ☐ Postal Service |
| ☐ Structural Drafting | ☐ Foundry Work | ☐ Engine Running | ☐ Secretarial |
| | ☐ Heat Treatment of Metals | ☐ Marine Engineering | ☐ Sign Lettering |
| | | ☐ Steam Electric | ☐ Social |
| | | ☐ Steam Engines | ☐ Stenography |
| | | | ☐ Traffic Management |

Name _____ Age _____ Home Address _____
City _____ State _____ Present Position _____

Working Hours _____ A.M. to _____ P.M. Length of Service in World War II _____
Special tuition rates to members of the Armed Forces. Enrollment under the G.I. Bill of Rights approved for War II Veterans.
Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Ltd., Montreal, Canada.

NEW

"EVEREADY" FLASHLIGHT BATTERY LASTS 93% LONGER!

**Tiny Cell Packs
Enough ENERGY to
Hit 200 Home Runs!**

Like baseball? Like to raise the roof when your favorite slugger blasts one out of the park? Then here's news: The amazing new "Eveready" flashlight cell contains energy equal to the amount needed to smash out 200 major league homers! Extra power makes "Eveready" batteries the season's champion for brilliant, lasting, low-cost light!



WHAT a supercharger is to a racing car—the new "Eveready" battery is to your flashlight. It "packs in the energy"—93% more of it than even the great pre-war "Eveready" cells gave you! You get nearly *double* the life... maximum light for nearly *twice* as long. For good service... better light... best quality... get these new "Eveready" brand flashlight batteries!

The registered trade-mark "Eveready" distinguishes products of

NATIONAL CARBON COMPANY, INC.

30 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y.

Unit of Union Carbide **UCC** and Carbon Corporation

Nearly twice the electric energy... almost *two times longer life* of brilliant white light than even famous pre-war "Eveready" flashlight batteries. That's today's *high-energy* "Eveready" battery, as proved by the "Light Industrial Flashlight" test devised by the American Standards Association.

93% MORE ENERGY



High Energy **MEANS**
BRIGHTER LIGHT, LONGER LIFE

EVEREADY
TRADE-MARK
FLASHLIGHT BATTERIES